



**ACT**  
Government

Australian Capital Territory

# Budget 2024–25

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Wellbeing Budget Statement

## Acknowledgement of Country



The ACT Government acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the ACT and recognise any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

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# From the Chief Minister

A government's first responsibility is the wellbeing of its people.

We know that Canberra is one of the most liveable cities in the world. However, we recognise that not everyone in the ACT benefits from these advantages equally. The challenges we've faced together over the last few years have impacted all of us in different ways.

Along with other progressive jurisdictions around the world, the ACT has been steadily building an approach to government that directly takes wellbeing into account as we develop policy, introduce legislation, and make investment decisions for our people and our future.

We started this journey in 2020 with the release of the ACT Wellbeing Framework.

Incorporating a wellbeing approach, measurement and impact assessments into the processes of government is a gradual and a considered effort. The inclusion of this wellbeing statement in our Territory Budget for the first time is a clear signal that we are on this path.

**Andrew Barr**  
**Chief Minister, Treasurer**



# Introduction

The ACT is taking a wellbeing approach to both maximise the benefits as one of the most liveable cities in the world and to meet the challenges we face as a community.

The ACT approach to wellbeing is about understanding and acting on what is important for the wellbeing of our people, our environment, and our institutions – individually, and as a whole. This means identifying and responding to areas of need and delivering change over time.

A wellbeing approach recognises that a strong economy and well-functioning institutions are crucial to the wellbeing of our people and our overall wellbeing as a community. It also considers other aspects of our quality of life, such as our access to healthcare and education, our level of social connection, and our safety within our communities – which the community told the Government mattered most to them.

Wellbeing in the ACT means recognising the balance between the things that are important and need urgent attention right now, and the things that will impact wellbeing over longer time periods, and across generations, and which require longer term consideration, recognition and investment.

In the lead-up to the 2024-25 Budget, the Government identified six priority areas where investment will make a particular difference to wellbeing. These are: *Housing, Physical and mental health, Women, Early years, Cost of living, and Addressing marginalisation and disadvantage.*

Governments everywhere are tightening their belts, and in the ACT the Government recognises the increasing cost of living and has invested in supporting those who have been disproportionately impacted by the challenges of the last few years. Some investments are tightly focussed on urgent and immediate needs, including around health, while others, such as investing in the early years, are intended to contribute to solutions that will take many years to mature, with the results seen over time.

This year's Budget builds on existing resources dedicated to these priority areas and seeks to further support those with less access to the benefits of living in the ACT, and who may have lower overall wellbeing – recognising the importance of funding that delivers more equitable wellbeing outcomes across our community.

The ACT Wellbeing Framework was introduced in 2020, in consultation with the ACT community, to identify those areas the community considered matter most to the wellbeing of Canberra and Canberrans.



# Canberra's wellbeing is at the centre of Government thinking and decision-making

A wellbeing approach enables government to focus on and to build investments in the areas that matter most to Canberrans' quality of life - in ways that will have the greatest impact today and into the future.

To realise this aspiration, the ACT Government has embedded wellbeing considerations in its policy development, decision-making processes and service delivery. Wellbeing Impact Assessments (WIAs) are now integrated into key decision-making processes, including the Cabinet process.

Central to embedding wellbeing is working with the community and with stakeholders to ensure that our wellbeing considerations reflect the issues that matter most to Canberrans.

As part of the 2024-25 Budget process, the Government met with over 70 local organisations, representing the Canberra community, to understand the issues they are experiencing and how these are affecting their membership and their clients.

We know that wellbeing outcomes are shaped by many factors, and by life events, as well as by the consequences of government decisions and investments.

A wellbeing approach is becoming more embedded with each budget round. Importantly, it is not about instant fixes to longstanding policy challenges, or about quick announcements. Instead, it represents a longer-term shift in outcomes that, over time, will lead to a more equitable, inclusive and vibrant community.

## What's a Wellbeing Impact Assessment?

Wellbeing Impact Assessments (WIAs) are a tool used by Government to identify how proposals will impact wellbeing across the Territory. They assess whose wellbeing will be affected, the evidence base to support the anticipated impacts, who has been engaged to inform the proposal, and what a successful outcome looks like.

WIAs support policy development from the ground up and inform decision-making. They are required for all Budget proposals and Cabinet Submissions.

Cross-agency groups review WIAs for Budget proposals, providing decision-makers with advice on the strength and depth of wellbeing considerations.

Training and support are provided to staff across the ACT Public Service to develop strong WIAs.



## Next stages in our wellbeing approach: research and evidence

Building a wellbeing approach in government takes time and access to comprehensive information. The ACT Government draws on a broad range of data to support the Budget process and our wellbeing approach.

The ACT Government is also working with key partners to lead research projects to better understand and improve wellbeing outcomes in the ACT.

This work includes a particular emphasis on long-term support for Canberrans who are experiencing deep and persistent disadvantage and social marginalisation. In addition to the organisations we work with in the community, we have established partnerships with universities, other research organisations and Commonwealth Government agencies to deepen evidence in the field of wellbeing.

In July 2023, the ACT Government committed to a strategic, jointly resourced partnership with the Australian National University. This partnership aligns the efforts of academics, public policy experts and data scientists around wellbeing. It will support a multi-disciplinary approach, using ACT Government

data, to understanding the causal relationships between life events and wellbeing. This in turn will facilitate the design and evaluation of interventions to positively impact Canberrans' wellbeing.

We are also developing our evidence base for wellbeing in collaboration with the University of Canberra through the University's *Living Well in the ACT Region* survey. This survey provides in-depth insights into the wellbeing of Canberrans.

The ACT has also recently been selected as the pilot jurisdiction for the *Life Course Data Initiative* project led by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and supported by other Commonwealth Government agencies. The project aims to provide analytical evidence to interrupt cycles of intergenerational disadvantage and support long-term change. It aims to bring together ACT and Commonwealth data relevant to different stages in the life course to identify the factors driving wellbeing outcomes. This will support the design, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programs.

### Wellbeing of specific groups

Some groups of people within our community face additional and intersecting wellbeing challenges. The Wellbeing Framework includes a commitment to report over time and where possible on the wellbeing of specific groups, and WIAs include advice on how proposals will impact people included in them.

These groups include: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; carers; children and young people; culturally and linguistically diverse people; LGBTIQ+ people; older Canberrans; people with disability; and across gender.



# Wellbeing priority areas for 2024-25

The Government's six wellbeing priority areas for the 2024-25 Budget build on existing services developed over time in these areas.

These are:

- > Housing
- > Physical and Mental Health
- > Women
- > Early Years
- > Cost of Living
- > Addressing Marginalisation and Disadvantage

These priority areas impact many people across the ACT and are interrelated. We recognise that Canberrans who are dealing with entrenched disadvantage, or those at risk of marginalisation, are often affected by multiple priority areas simultaneously. The Budget wellbeing priorities help to identify where strategic investments can address complex areas of need that span multiple agencies of government.

For example, government investment in housing positively impacts housing availability and affordability, cost of living, and supports community members at risk of marginalisation and disadvantage, including women and children escaping violence. It also delivers long-term preventive benefits by improving early life circumstances for children and enhancing physical and mental health through secure and stable accommodation.

Funding across the priority areas in this Budget will complement existing funding and activities. This includes through funding community sector organisations to deliver support services, running grant programs, and leading various strategies and projects including Best Start for Canberra's Children: the First 1000 Days Strategy, the ACT Women's Plan 2016-2026, concessions programs, and the Affordable Housing Project Fund.

## **3 out of 4 Canberrans reported typical or high levels of personal wellbeing in April 2023.**

We know this is only part of the picture, with some groups more likely to experience lower wellbeing, including people who are unemployed and looking for work, single parents with children, members of the LGBTIQ+ community, carers, and renters.

University of Canberra, *Living Well in the ACT Region* survey, April 2023



# Housing

Access to affordable, stable and suitable housing is fundamental to wellbeing.

Housing affordability is a national issue, and the ACT is not immune to these pressures. It underpins cost of living pressures, particularly for vulnerable communities and for those experiencing, or at risk of experiencing homelessness.

Interest rates and housing supply pressures stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic have further impacted housing supply and affordability. A growing city needs a variety of housing options to meet the needs of a changing population and to attract suitably qualified workers in areas where the ACT is experiencing a skills shortage.

The Government is focused on supporting people into homes that are affordable, accessible, and appropriate to their needs. We do this in several ways, including partnering with the Commonwealth Government and investing in programs that assist with housing and rental affordability. We also work to increase the supply of suitable homes, deliver strong and stable public, social and community housing systems, and provide effective wrap around support for people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing homelessness.

The Government has committed to 1000 renewed and 400 additional public housing dwellings by end of financial year 2026-27 and has set a target of 600 more affordable rental properties by 2025-26.

## 2024-25 Budget Initiatives

The 2024-25 Budget includes initiatives worth **\$118 million** to strengthen social housing and homelessness assistance including:

- > **\$51 million** in 2024-25 to support Housing ACT to maintain and grow public housing numbers and expand the social housing stock in the ACT through the *Social Housing Accelerator Program*;
- > **\$57.4 million** over four years for repairs, maintenance and upgrades of public housing stock and maintenance and tenancy services; and
- > **\$6.5 million** over four years for the continued expansion of specialist homelessness service capacity (including funding to expand the Youth Foyer to the new CIT Woden campus, accommodating young people in education who are homeless or at risk of homelessness).

This Budget includes initiatives worth **\$87 million** to increase affordable rental housing and home ownership, including:

- > increasing the *Affordable Housing Project Fund* from \$60 million to \$80 million to expand the social and affordable housing stock in the ACT, along with a forward pipeline of land release for community housing;
- > further reduction in conveyance duty and expanding duty concessions for pensioners and those with disability (including a new Severe Disability Duty Exemption to commence from 1 July 2025);
- > expanding eligibility for the *Home Buyer Concession Scheme*; and
- > extending the operation of the *Rent Relief Fund* to assist low-income Canberrans experiencing rental stress or financial hardship, to help them pay their rent and in turn meet costs of other essentials.

The 2024-25 Budget continues support to improve housing choice and quality, including:

- > continuing the Vulnerable Household Energy Support Scheme providing ceiling insulation and electrification to public housing tenants, community housing providers and low-income households;
- > funding to electrify all feasible public housing by 2030;
- > initiatives under the Government's Integrated Energy Plan for electrification transition, including a new pilot Community Partnership Electrification Program which provides grant payments for electrification upgrades to up to 350 eligible low-income households;
- > continuing the *Sustainable Household Scheme*; and
- > funding for strategic planning activities to support land release and future development.

Further information about how the Government is investing in housing in this Budget is in the *2024-25 Housing Budget Statement*.

## Building on recent investment and action

Funding in this year's Budget builds on previous investment by the Government, including:

- > the *Affordable Housing Project Fund*, expanded in this Budget, which is already supporting an estimated 280 affordable rental homes across six Build-to-Rent projects, including community housing projects such as the Ginninderry Women's Housing Initiative;
- > the *Affordable Home Purchase Scheme* has already supported over 400 households on low-to-moderate incomes;

- > the *Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program*, expanded in this Budget, will deliver 400 additional public housing dwellings, replace 1000 end-of-life dwellings and invest in additional public housing repairs and maintenance to maintain high-quality public housing;
- > growing community housing in Canberra by releasing a pipeline of dwellings and sites and optimising funding opportunities available through the ACT Government's *Affordable Housing Project Fund* and the Commonwealth's *Housing Australia Future Fund*, which aims to provide up to 1,200 new social and affordable dwellings in Canberra over five years;
- > promoting the *Affordable Community Housing Land Tax Exemption* scheme to increase the number of affordable rental properties available to low-income households;
- > delivering the Commonwealth-initiated *Social Housing Accelerator Program* to increase the supply of social housing by 55 to 65 homes;
- > the *Private Rental Assistance Program* providing financial assistance to women escaping domestic and family violence;
- > continuing specialist homelessness programs commenced during the COVID-19 pandemic and further expanding the capacity of frontline services;
- > the *Rent Relief Fund*, providing financial assistance to eligible private renters or occupants experiencing rental stress or financial hardship;
- > supported 18,700 households to insulate and electrify by providing zero interest loans through the *Sustainable Household Scheme*. These households are now cooler in summer, warmer in winter, with average energy bill savings of \$735-\$960 a year;
- > in addition, 1,000 low-income households have received \$2,500 rebates through the Home Energy Support Program to replace gas appliances with efficient electric appliances and install rooftop solar. These households are also benefitting from improved thermal comfort and lower energy bills; and
- > the Government has also delivered a simplified planning system to address planning-related barriers to new housing and ensure that the system provides for more affordable housing, through District strategies and a new Territory Plan. Funding has also been committed to accelerate further land release.



# Physical and mental health

Our health is critical to personal and community wellbeing.

Our physical and mental health are intrinsically linked and play a large role in our overall wellbeing. In recent years in the ACT and nationally, our health systems and our community's resilience have been tested. The COVID-19 pandemic and other illnesses, stressors related to rising housing insecurity, increased cost of living pressures and concern over significant global issues such as climate change and conflict have all contributed to growing mental and physical health challenges.

In difficult times when physical and mental health are more challenged, a well-resourced and accessible health system is even more important for improving the physical and mental health of Canberrans, which in turn positively impacts many other areas of wellbeing.

## 2024-25 Budget Initiatives

In the 2024-25 Budget, the Government is investing to support the health of Canberrans of all ages, with a focus on enhancing our public health system, and on delivering initiatives that address immediate needs, as well as fostering long-term wellbeing. This includes investments in high quality health infrastructure and facilities, and to deliver hospital and other health services.

- > **\$86 million** over four years to support safe nursing and midwifery care by delivering the second stage of a phased introduction of minimum nurse and midwife-to-patient ratios.
- > **\$52.7 million** over four years to increase emergency and elective surgeries to support growing demand for healthcare services in the ACT.
- > **\$52.8 million** over four years for the construction of new community-based health services in North Gungahlin and the Inner South and preliminary design work for an additional community-based health service in West Belconnen.
- > **\$47.9 million** over four years to upgrade and enhance health infrastructure at Canberra Hospital.
- > **\$53.9 million** over four years to support inpatient capacity at the University of Canberra Hospital.
- > **\$19.2 million** over four years for the implementation of Voluntary Assisted Dying in the ACT, with ongoing funding to support the service as it becomes available from November 2025.

- > **\$2.8 million** over four years to help improve mental health outcomes for people with high intensity support needs.
- > **\$7.7 million** over four years for the second Police, Ambulance and Clinician Early Response (PACER) team, which provides safe assessment and treatment of people experiencing acute mental health crises.
- > **\$1.7 million** in 2024-25 to continue a range of child and youth mental health support programs.
- > **\$897,000** over 2024-25 and 2025-26 to support culturally appropriate mental health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- > **\$18.5 million** over four years to improve care for older Canberrans, including the refurbishment of rooms at North Canberra Hospital to support the safety of cognitively impaired patients.
- > **\$1.8 million** over three years to support the continuation of the Australian-first ACT drug checking service.

## Building on recent investment and action

The 2024-25 investments build on the delivery in recent years of key health facilities and services in a system designed to enable Canberrans to access vital services when and where they need them, from early intervention through to crisis support.

### Supporting the mental health of Canberrans

We know that the best way to support the mental health of people in our community is to address issues early before a crisis point is reached. We have and will continue to invest in areas that provide early supports while also ensuring that enough funding is provided to acute services to support those that need it.

- > Following the successful establishment of the Safe Haven Belconnen in 2021, we are developing a second Safe Haven at the Canberra Hospital. This will provide a space for people over 16 to access mental health support in a calm and caring environment.
- > We are providing additional funding over two years to Canberra Community Law to increase the capacity of its Mental Health Justice Clinic, which provides free, independent, and confidential legal assistance to people experiencing mental ill-health.

- > We continue to target funding towards mental health supports for youth and young adults, including programs such as MindMap Online Youth Navigation Portal, Stepping Stones, Youth Aware of Mental Health Program and WOKE, and the establishment of a Child/Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Services Network. We are also focused on delivering critical mental health supports to young people who are experiencing or are at risk of suicide and self-harm.

### Delivering an effective public health care system

The Government has a comprehensive plan for our health system and is committed to supporting Canberrans to access the services they need. This is achieved through targeted investment and action to provide necessary services and the right health infrastructure and facilities to meet demand.

This has included delivery of an important commitment to legislate voluntary assisted dying in the ACT. This enables eligible Canberrans to have the right to make informed end-of-life choices that align with their preferences and values.

Key recent health investments:

- > Our comprehensive response to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency to keep our community safe and well.
- > The Northside Hospital Project in Bruce is improving the resilience and capacity of our health system and bringing together contemporary hospital services and consumer-centred and flexible models of care.
- > In the 2023-24 Budget, the Government committed to the redevelopment of the Watson Health Precinct and the design and construction of a new community-based health service in South Tuggeranong.
- > The Government continues to invest in our health workforce, including boosting the workforce and resources for the new Critical Services Building at Canberra Hospital.
- > The 2023-24 Budget provided funding to enhance specialist health services for LGBTIQ+ Canberrans.



# Women

Improving gender equality leads to in a stronger, fairer, and more prosperous community for everyone.

Gender inequality remains a pressing issue nationally and here in the ACT. While the ACT has a smaller gender pay gap than the national average, and a higher workforce participation rate for women, challenges persist. Women continue to experience higher rates of domestic, family and sexual violence, lower incomes and lifetime earnings, greater housing stress and rates of homelessness, and contribute significantly more unpaid labour than men.

The ACT Government is committed to gender equality and takes a whole of government approach to address the underlying causes of inequality and the unique challenges women continue to face. This includes

targeted investment and action in areas such as maternal and reproductive health, partnering with the community sector and with frontline domestic, family and sexual violence services to support women's safety, and continuing efforts to increase workforce participation, particularly in leadership roles.

The Government is also continuing to progress the development of gender responsive budgeting in the ACT through a wellbeing budget approach. There is significant overlap between wellbeing budget practices and gender responsive budgeting tools and practices, with the ACT's wellbeing budget approach including consideration of the gendered impacts of proposals.

## 2024-25 Budget Initiatives

In the 2024-25 Budget, the Government is continuing to invest in supporting women through the ongoing implementation of the *ACT Women's Plan 2016-26*. The Plan sets out the ACT Government's ongoing commitment to work in partnership with non-government organisations, business and the broader community towards gender equality for all ACT women.

The wellbeing budget priorities of housing, physical and mental health, cost of living and the early years all have a particular resonance for women. Many of the investments that go to these priority areas and impact positively on women are described elsewhere in this document. More detailed information about measures in the 2024-25 Budget that impact women and girls are described in the *2024-25 Women's Budget Statement*.

The focus for investments for women in the 2024-25 Budget:

- > extends initiatives for frontline domestic, family and sexual violence services (including developing and trialling new and innovative responses);
- > provides support for a number of frontline specialised domestic, family and sexual violence services, including specialised sexual violence support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- > expands the death review to support responding to coercive control as part of the *ACT Domestic and Family Violence Risk Assessment Framework*;
- > provides additional support for obstetrics and gynaecology services to meet growing demand;
- > delivers the Understanding Building and Construction Program in 5 ACT public schools;
- > funds the ACT Women's Return to Work Program and Return to Work grants, which support vulnerable women experiencing barriers in returning to the workforce;
- > supports the Early Learning Connection Program which provides women with flexible career pathways into early childhood education;
- > supports the Health Justice Partnerships Program, which provides free and confidential legal advice to women experiencing domestic and family violence;
- > funds the implementation of the *Period Products and Facilities (Access) Act 2023* and installing period product dispensers in all three Child and Family Centres and the Child Development Service, with work underway to roll out dispensers in ACT public hospitals, public health facilities, and ACT public schools;

- > develops a comprehensive Child and Family Network to support young children and their families, using a combination of existing and new infrastructure and making services easier to navigate for families; and
- > continues the ACT's accessible abortions scheme to include no-cost medical abortions at selected general practices in the ACT.

## Building on recent investment and action

The Government is committed to enabling women and girls to reach their full potential. We have made significant efforts over the past few years to enhance safety, workforce participation, health and overall wellbeing of women and girls in the ACT through dedicated actions and continued investment.

Key highlights include:

- > recommendations of the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Steering Committee Report are being implemented to improve systemic responses to sexual violence across the spectrum of need;
- > further work is also underway to improve the capacity and capability of frontline domestic, family, and sexual violence services to meet increased demand, and ensure appropriately targeted supports are available;
- > the Government is continuing to fund the Return to Work Program, empowering ACT women to rejoin the workforce and boost their financial independence;
- > the Government is delivering Maternity in Focus: The ACT Public Maternity System Plan 2022-2032. This plan sets out the Government's priorities for the next 10 years to ensure the public maternity system is best placed to meet the needs of women, pregnant people, their babies and families, and the workforce;
- > the Government passed the *Period Products and Facilities (Access) Act 2023* in June 2023. This is the first legislated support for free period products anywhere in Australia; and
- > since April 2023, no-cost surgical and medical abortions, and Long-Acting Reversible Contraception at the time of abortion, have been available for all ACT residents.

The *2024-25 Women's Budget Statement* provides an overview of the Government's continued and new investment towards addressing barriers faced by women and girls across the focus areas of the *ACT Women's Plan 2016-26*: health and wellbeing; safety and inclusion; leadership and workforce participation; housing and homelessness; and appropriate and accessible services.

# Early years

Supporting children and their families during the early years sets them up for a good start to life.

Young children facing developmental vulnerability in areas such as physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, and language, cognitive and communication skills risk falling behind their peers and struggling to catch up.

The ACT Government has a long record of supporting the progress of children and is committed to ensuring that all children have the opportunity to thrive in their

early years. This is fundamental to positive wellbeing, a sense of belonging and to resilience throughout life. The ACT has been selected as the pilot jurisdiction for the development of a 'life course' research data asset that combines ACT and Commonwealth administrative data, to identify and address entrenched disadvantage among the 0-14 year old cohort.



## 2024-25 Budget Initiatives

In the 2024-25 Budget, the Government is continuing to build on significant and ongoing investments to support the health, safety and wellbeing of young children in the ACT at the start of their lives.

- > **\$57.7 million** over four years to:
  - expand paediatric care at Canberra Hospital and address a range of high priority actions within the *Child and Adolescent Clinical Services Plan 2023-2030*; and
  - fit out a location in Molonglo for community-based paediatric services for children with, or at risk of, developmental delay and/or chronic health conditions.
- > **\$17.9 million** over four years to expand the Special Care Nursery and Neonatal Intensive Care Unit to meet patient demand and provide care for critically unwell children.
- > **\$10 million** over four years from 2024-25 to progress the service-system reform agenda concerning child protection and Out of Home Care (OoHC) under *Next Steps for Our Kids 2022-2030* strategy.
- > Waiving the registration fee for Early Childhood Teachers (ECT) for the first two years to encourage greater uptake.
- > **\$2.8 million** over four years to meet the cost of additional needs-based enrolments based on the outcome of the 2024 ACT School Census, to assist:
  - an additional 37 students with disability;
  - an additional 27 low socioeconomic status students; and
  - an additional 105 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

## Building on recent investment and action

Initiatives in the 2024-25 Budget will support previous funding decisions for early years' strategies that are continuing to be delivered across the ACT Government. By supporting access to early childhood education for three-year olds, prioritising holistic, wrap-around support for children and their families in the first 1000 days, and providing effective maternal and child healthcare, we are focusing action where we know it will make the greatest difference over time.

- > *Set Up for Success*, launched in 2020, is a nation-leading ten-year plan for early childhood education and care in the ACT. A key element is access to quality early childhood education for three-year-old children whose families would otherwise be unable to access this, but would benefit the most from it including families experiencing adversity and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children accessing Koori preschool. The program has been broadened to enable all three-year-olds in the ACT to access one day per week of free quality early childhood education.
- > *Next Steps for Our Kids Strategy 2022-2030* captures a vision for an ACT child protection system which places the needs of children and young people at the centre of its mission and prioritises their best interests as the paramount consideration in decision making. It includes an integration of earlier family support, prevention, child protection, out of home care and youth justice and seeks to strengthen families who interact with this system.
- > Investing in perinatal, infant and child mental health and wellbeing services.



## Cost of living

Rising inflation impacts all households but has a disproportionate impact on the wellbeing of vulnerable groups in our community.

The rising costs of living are continuing to impact households, families, and individuals in our community, forcing people to make difficult decisions about how they spend their money to make ends meet. Services have indicated greater levels of vulnerability in the community, with higher costs of food, fuel, medicine, transport, clothing, and other essentials driving vulnerable Canberrans into further hardship.

Financial stability and security play a crucial role in positive physical and mental health, ensure access to safe and secure housing, and allow for participation in activities essential for quality of life.

## 2024-25 Budget Initiatives

To support the community during these challenging times, the ACT Government is continuing to provide targeted investment to support Canberrans with rising costs. Information about how the Government is supporting Canberrans with cost of living pressures through the 2024-25 Budget is in the *2024-25 Cost of Living Budget Statement*.

Key initiatives include:

- > **\$2.6 million** in 2024-25 to expand programs to assist vulnerable households with ongoing cost of living pressures from energy prices. This will:
  - provide an Electricity, Gas and Water Rebate (formerly the Utilities Concession) of \$800 to eligible recipients in 2024-25; and
  - expand the Utilities Hardship Fund and increase the value of vouchers available from \$100 to \$300;
- > **\$5.2 million** over two years to pilot a new Community Partnership Electrification Program;
- > **\$1.6 million** in 2024-25 to provide a one-off payment of \$250 to apprentices and trainees to assist with cost of living pressures;
- > increased support for emergency material and financial aid programs and for food relief services to provide additional cost of living support for vulnerable Canberrans; and
- > additional funding for the Future of Education Equity Fund for the 2024 school year, to meet the increasing demand for financial assistance.

## Building on recent cost of living investment and action

Recent rises in the costs of living are continuing to put pressure on households in our community and require targeted investment and action from government. We are committed to supporting Canberrans to manage these challenges.

The budget initiatives associated with the priority areas of housing, physical and mental health, women, and for families with young children, the early years all contribute to addressing increases in the cost of living.

In recent years, we have delivered on a commitment to relieving cost of living increases through making changes to utilities concessions, establishing the Rent Relief Fund, launching targeted schemes to assist households through the energy transition towards electrification and by improving the thermal comfort of homes. By expanding the eligibility criteria for the Electricity, Gas and Water Rebate (formerly the Utilities Concession) to include Commonwealth Health Care Card holders, an additional 12,000 households are able to benefit from this support.

We have also worked with the community sector to deliver targeted relief through food and material aid programs and made it easier for people with disability or mobility restriction to travel with changes to the Taxi Subsidy Scheme. We have also broadened access to legal assistance.

# Addressing marginalisation and disadvantage

A society where everyone feels welcome and empowered to participate is a significant contributor to community wellbeing.

There are some cohorts in our community, particularly those vulnerable to changing circumstances, who can become marginalised and more likely to experience extended periods of disadvantage. These circumstances can result in long-term and intergenerational negative impacts on individuals and their families.

It is a core priority of government to respond to the needs of Canberrans at risk of marginalisation and disadvantage. Supporting those who need it most fosters greater participation in society, helps create a sense of belonging, and enables everyone in our community to lead lives of personal value and significance.

The way that different aspects of identity interact and shape life experiences can at times increase the risk of marginalisation and disadvantage for some people and groups in our community. We use information and data, including from engagement with the community, to identify areas where prioritising initiatives can help to achieve a fairer, more equitable and inclusive society.

## 2024-25 Budget Initiatives

Many of the initiatives outlined against other wellbeing budget priorities in the 2024-25 Budget are designed to contribute to supporting the more marginalised and disadvantaged in our community and reflect a focus on people in this situation across the whole of the ACT budget.

We know that experiences of marginalisation or disadvantage may change over the course of a person's lifetime due to changing circumstances, and that not all members of our community will have the same experiences, including within groups that continue to face systemic barriers. We have chosen not to relist initiatives here that will support people experiencing marginalisation and disadvantage in our community, in part to avoid labelling those who may access these services.

## Building on recent investment and action

The Government has continued to provide services directly to support those at higher risk of marginalisation and disadvantage in our community, as well as delivering a range of concessions programs and grants, and working closely with community sector partners that provide frontline support. Many of these initiatives have been reported against one of the other wellbeing Budget priorities above.

The ACT's role as the pilot jurisdiction for the *Life Course Data Initiative* project led by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and supported by other Commonwealth Government agencies will bring together ACT and Commonwealth data to support the design, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programs aimed at addressing entrenched disadvantage.



Australian Capital Territory

# Budget 2024–25