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A Living Blueprint for an Inclusive Canberra

ACT 2026–27 Budget Submission

On behalf of the Australian Multicultural Action Network (AMAN)

Submitted by Ravi Krishnamurthy, President, AMAN

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How to Read This Living Blueprint

This submission is intentionally designed as a living blueprint rather than a conventional budget document. It does not simply list funding requests or program expansions. Instead, it weaves lived experience, system design, fiscal responsibility, and long-term reform into a single narrative. Each paragraph stands on its own, with clear subtitles to support accessibility, yet together they form an integrated roadmap for a fairer, more efficient ACT. The aim is to translate public intent into lived outcomes, ensuring that the ACT Budget works for everyone, especially those who face the greatest structural barriers.

What a Budget Really Touches

A budget is often described as a financial statement, but in reality it is a social document. It determines whether an older migrant can understand a hospital letter or misses an appointment that affects their health. It shapes whether a young person feels safe catching public transport at night or withdraws from education and employment. It influences whether a woman escaping violence can find culturally safe financial advice or remains trapped in harm. Budgets quietly shape dignity, trust, and belonging, often without fanfare.

Translation as the Missing Link

From AMAN's perspective, budgeting is not only about allocation. It is about translation. Translation is literal, through language access and communication, and systemic, through how services are designed and delivered. When translation fails, even well-intentioned policies do not reach those who need them most. When translation succeeds, systems become easier for everyone to navigate. This submission is built on a simple but powerful premise: if systems are designed for those at the margins, they will work better for all Canberrans.

Who AMAN Is in Practice

The Australian Multicultural Action Network operates at the intersection of policy, systems, and everyday community life. AMAN works across health access, mental health, disability inclusion, aged care, justice engagement, housing stability, volunteering, digital equity, and emergency preparedness. Our work is grounded in daily engagement with families, seniors, carers, young people, and volunteers who are deeply invested in Canberra's future but are often navigating systems that were not designed with their realities in mind.

Leadership and Accountability

As President of AMAN, I bring to this submission decades of experience across governance, technology, education, justice, community safety, and multicultural advocacy. This leadership is shaped equally by formal policy work and by listening to community members navigating complex systems under pressure. The accountability reflected here is twofold: fidelity to community truth and responsibility to public value. These are not competing obligations. They are complementary foundations of effective government.

Wellbeing as an Integrated System

The ACT Wellbeing Framework provides a strong foundation for measuring quality of life. Its real power, however, lies not in measurement alone but in integration. For CALD communities, wellbeing domains intersect most sharply where systems meet. Health intersects with language access. Education intersects with family capability. Housing intersects with legal literacy. Employment intersects with recognition of skills. Safety intersects with trust in institutions. When these intersections are weak, people fall through gaps and costs escalate.

Why Integration Saves Money

Fragmented systems create duplication, delay, and crisis escalation. Integrated systems prevent problems before they become expensive emergencies. Investment in integration is therefore not an added cost but a fiscal strategy. The ACT Government can reduce downstream expenditure by strengthening upstream coordination. This submission proposes targeted investments that align wellbeing outcomes with budget discipline and long-term sustainability.

Wellbeing Integration Pilots

AMAN recommends funding Wellbeing Integration Pilots in selected high-diversity suburbs. These pilots would co-design service pathways with CALD communities, embed multilingual navigators across health, housing, and community services, and use real-time indicators to track outcomes. Importantly, they would test preventative interventions before issues escalate into crisis, generating evidence for scalable reform across the Territory.

Health Access versus Health Outcomes

CALD communities are not disengaged from health systems. They are often over-engaged at the wrong point. Late presentation, avoidable hospitalisation, and untreated chronic conditions reflect upstream barriers rather than individual behaviour. Language discordance, limited health literacy, stigma around mental illness, and system complexity push people toward emergency care instead of prevention.

Health as Navigation

AMAN proposes reframing health investment around navigation-enabled care. Community health navigators embedded within multicultural organisations and linked to hospitals and primary care networks can support appointment coordination, follow-up, and treatment adherence. These roles reduce emergency department misuse, improve patient experience, and deliver measurable savings across the health system.

Accessible Health Information

Plain-language and Easy Read health resources are essential infrastructure. Co-designing materials with CALD seniors and people with disability ensures information is usable, not merely translated. Resources must be available proactively, both digitally and in print, to support early help-seeking and informed decision-making across diverse communities.

Culturally Adapted Prevention

Preventive health programs must reflect cultural context to be effective. Respiratory health, chronic disease management, and mental wellbeing initiatives tailored for CALD communities improve uptake and outcomes. These programs strengthen community resilience while reducing long-term pressure on acute services and specialist care.

Education Beyond the Classroom

Education does not stop at school gates. For many CALD families, learning occurs in homes, places of worship, community centres, and online spaces. Parents often want to support their children but lack familiarity with the Australian education system, confidence engaging with schools, or access to translated information.

Family Learning Bridges

Family Learning Bridges are proposed as small, scalable investments that build parental system literacy, support intergenerational learning, and reduce long-term educational inequality. When families understand how systems work, children benefit academically and emotionally, and schools experience stronger engagement and retention.

Adult Skills and Participation

Adult English and digital literacy programs remain critical, particularly for women and seniors. Flexible, community-based delivery linked to employment, civic participation, and service access ensures these programs generate economic and social returns rather than remaining isolated interventions.

Housing as Stability, Not Just Shelter

Housing stress disproportionately affects CALD communities, including new migrants, older renters, and multigenerational households. Low awareness of tenancy rights, vulnerability to exploitation, and fear of authority systems often delay help-seeking until eviction is imminent.

Preventing Housing Crisis

Multilingual tenancy education, culturally safe financial counselling, and early legal intervention prevent evictions and homelessness. Stability at home reduces downstream costs across health, justice, and child protection systems while strengthening neighbourhood cohesion and wellbeing.

Safety Through Trust

Safety is relational as well as regulatory. When trust in institutions is low, under-reporting increases and early help is avoided. This allows harm to escalate quietly until crisis intervention becomes unavoidable and costly for individuals and government alike.

Community Anchors as Prevention

Community Anchors are trusted organisations that translate policy into practice, identify emerging risks early, and support civic participation. Sustained funding for these anchors is an investment in prevention, social cohesion, and institutional trust across the ACT.

Climate Equity Matters

Climate policy is social policy. CALD communities are more likely to live in less energy-efficient housing, have limited access to climate information, and work in frontline roles exposed to environmental risk. Without targeted support, climate transition risks widening existing inequities.

A Just and Inclusive Transition

Multilingual climate resilience information, targeted support for low-income households, and inclusive consultation on transport planning ensure the benefits of transition are shared equitably. Environmental sustainability and social equity must progress together to maintain public confidence.

Culture as Productive Infrastructure

Arts and culture are not peripheral. They are productive infrastructure that builds social cohesion, reduces isolation, and strengthens identity and belonging. Multicultural cultural participation supports mental health, civic pride, and community resilience.

Employment and Skills Recognition

CALD communities experience persistent underemployment due to barriers in skills recognition and local experience. Skilled migrant pathways, mentoring, and employer partnerships unlock productivity, reduce welfare dependence, and strengthen the ACT economy.

Volunteering as Social Capital

Volunteering is often treated as cost-free, yet without support volunteers burn out and services retract. Investment in volunteer capability building, simplified compliance, and recognition of CALD volunteer pathways sustains Canberra's social fabric and service capacity.

Justice and Financial Safety

Legal and financial systems remain among the least accessible for CALD communities. Early advice, culturally safe delivery, and integrated legal-financial support reduce court costs, incarceration, and crisis intervention while improving fairness and access to justice.

From Outputs to Outcomes

This submission calls for a shift in how success is defined. Not simply how much was spent, but who was reached, what was prevented, and what capacity was built. Equity-focused investment improves efficiency, accountability, and public trust.

Fiscal Responsibility Through Equity

From a budget perspective, these proposals reduce crisis spending, improve service efficiency, strengthen workforce participation, and build long-term social cohesion. Equity is not a cost. It is a multiplier that delivers sustained public value.

Leadership as Stewardship

Leadership in budgeting is stewardship of systems, not announcement of programs. Humane, responsive systems require foresight, evidence, and partnership between government and community.

A Shared Vision for Canberra

An inclusive Canberra is not built by accident. It is budgeted for carefully, courageously, and collectively. On behalf of AMAN, this submission is offered in a spirit of partnership to help ensure that Canberra's diversity remains its greatest strength, now and into the future.