



Karinyahouse®

**Submission to the ACT  
Budget 2026-27**

*January 2026*

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Karinya House recognises the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to own and control their cultures and pay our respect to these rights. Karinya House acknowledges, respects and seeks to learn from the diversity of Indigenous cultures, Indigenous world views, lifestyles and customary laws.

We extend our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who for thousands of years have preserved the cultures and practices of their communities on Country.

This land was never surrendered, and we acknowledge that it always was and will continue to always be Aboriginal land.

## About Karinya House

Every woman who is pregnant or parenting should be surrounded with the support she needs. However, not every woman has safety, shelter, or a positive support network.

Karinya House stands as a beacon of hope and support for women who are pregnant or parenting a baby, ensuring they are never alone in their journey. We deeply value each woman's unique experiences and are committed to offering practical assistance and empowering opportunities that foster self-confidence and personal development. Our professional services and facilities are tailored to meet the diverse needs of the women we walk alongside, creating a safe-haven where women can thrive. At Karinya House, we believe in nurturing a community of care and compassion, providing a sanctuary where women can grow, heal, build hope and plan a future for themselves and their families.

Karinya House walks with women in Canberra and the surrounding Region. A local, not for profit organisation, the Karinya House funding framework is a true cooperative of individuals, families, community groups, corporates, philanthropic and government funding partners. This cooperative approach to funding is a tangible expression of positive recognition of women in our community, who are pregnant or parenting.

## Contact

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## Executive Summary

Karinya House is committed to working in partnership with Government and community to improve outcomes for women who are pregnant or parenting, and their babies and children, in the ACT region. In our 2026-27 Budget Submission, we highlight four key areas of need:

### **Proposal 1: Co-invest to help end homelessness for pregnant and parenting women**

The ACT Government are invited to co-invest in an innovative pilot that will help end homelessness for pregnant and parenting women who are in crisis in the ACT. This pilot will provide semi-independent and supported housing for women who are pregnant or parenting newborns and are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. It is a “step-down” from Karinya House’s more intensive 24/7 service and will support women to maintain tenancies and achieve longer-term housing.

### **Proposal 2: Resource a Commissioner for the Perinatal and Early years in ACT**

Resource a Commissioner to oversee the Perinatal and Early Year’s period as per Recommendation 33 in the Inquiry into Raising Children in the ACT. This would ideally be accompanied by supporting reforms and accountability mechanisms in the *Best Start* second implementation plan.

### **Proposal 3: Improving Data Collection**

Obtain an accurate picture of the number of women, and their babies and infants, in the ACT region who are pregnant or parenting and are homeless or in insecure living situations and/or who are experiencing domestic and family violence.

### **Proposal 4: Homelessness service resourcing and recognition**

Extend the Community Sector Funding Boost for homelessness services beyond 2026 and roll it into base line funding and subject it to indexation, to ensure homelessness services can meet the needs of vulnerable Canberrans.

## Proposals

Notwithstanding concerted effort from Government and community alike, there are significant barriers to women accessing appropriate care before and after pregnancy. Women are also more vulnerable to disadvantage (homelessness, domestic violence, poverty, access to healthcare) the moment they fall pregnant. This impacts their wellbeing, the wellbeing of their children and has intergenerational impacts for the ACT community. For this reason, demand for perinatal services is high and likely to increase beyond current levels<sup>1</sup>. Our four recommendations focus on actions that can improve access and quality of care for women and birth parents, and their babies and children, in the ACT.

### **Proposal 1: Co-invest in an innovative pilot to help end homelessness for pregnant and parenting women in crisis in the ACT**

The ACT Government are invited to co-invest in an innovative pilot that will help end homelessness for pregnant and parenting women who are in crisis in the ACT. Single women with children are among the most vulnerable and impoverished cohorts in Australia – experiencing disproportionately higher rates of homelessness or housing insecurity. This pilot will provide semi-independent and supported housing for women experiencing or at risk of homelessness. It is a “step-down” from Karinya House’s more intensive 24/7 service and will support women to maintain tenancies and achieve longer-term housing. The pilot is already well underway – and backed by two major philanthropists, as well as Karinya House and a local community housing provider. Land has been identified and building designs finalised. The ACT Government are invited to commit to being a co-investor in this innovative program, by contributing to the wrap around/ delivery costs to ensure women, and their babies, are supported with social services to maintain their tenancies and achieve positive wellbeing outcomes.

This pilot will be a significant step towards ending homelessness for all pregnant and parenting women with newborns in the ACT, which is achievable within a generation and with a modest co-investment from Government and community.

**Policy alignment:** ACT Wellbeing Framework, Best Start Strategy, Maternity in Focus System Plan 2022-2032, Housing Strategy (including election commitments relating to social and public housing).

**Budgetary implications:** allocate \$120-140,000 annually over 2-3 years to provide women and their babies a pathway to long-term independent housing security and wellbeing. Karinya House and other partners would co-invest a similar amount of their own resources to make the project viable.

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<sup>1</sup> Despite low fertility rates, high inward migration to Canberra coupled with population growth and continued rental / housing stress and domestic family violence factors are projected to increase both the number of women giving birth in the ACT over the next few years as well as the number of women experiencing one of more vulnerabilities during the perinatal period (reference: Strategic Development Group Demand Analysis 2024).

## **Proposal 2: Resource a Commissioner for the Perinatal and Early years in ACT**

The ACT Government has many initiatives aimed at the first 1000 days period, however these policies are often siloed and mandates dispersed. This makes it difficult to track progress against the 1000 Days Strategy goals, to ensure that all parts of government and community (e.g. housing, domestic violence services) are working meeting the needs of women in the perinatal period, and to fill urgent gaps in the service system for women and birth parents.

As we proposed in 2025, we continue to encourage Government to accept Recommendation 33 of the Raising Children Inquiry and resource a Commissioner for the Perinatal and Early Years period. A Commissioner would “...provide oversight for the mother or birthing parent, baby and family for the first 1000 days”. The Commissioner could also identify gaps in the legislative, policy and service landscape for women and propose measures to rectify these. The Commissioner would promote the needs and rights of women and carers, as well as their babies/ infants – a cohort which is currently missing in the Human Rights landscape and Commissioner framework in the ACT. We are open to this role being integrated into another Commissioner’s portfolio, provided the functions are resourced fully and not diluted. Additional information on the Commissioner proposal is [here](#).

To support the Commissioner’s work, we also encourage Government to ensure that the Best Start second implementation plan includes clear actions and targets (that are monitored) across all enabling departments in CSD to achieve holistic wellbeing outcomes for women and children (especially housing, health, early childhood education, child protection and domestic and family violence). This would reflect the reality that women face multiple complex and intersectional barriers to wellbeing before and after pregnancy – for example; domestic violence is a cause and consequence of homelessness so neither can be addressed in isolation.

**Policy alignment:** ACT Wellbeing Framework, First 1000 Days Strategy and Action Plan, Maternity in Focus Strategy 2022-2032, Best Start for our Kids.

**Budgetary implications:** Funding for Commissioner position, plus associated on-costs and support staff in 2025-26, plus annual recurrent funding beyond that.

## **Proposal 3: Improving Data Collection**

As we reported in 2025, we still do not know how many women who are pregnant or parenting babies, or the number of babies and infants, that are homeless or in crisis in the ACT. It is imperative that we obtain an accurate assessment of need to ensure that no woman, baby or infant is homeless or unsupported in our region. There are multiple points at which Government could consider extracting, obtaining then publishing this information from existing or adapted data collection sources – for example; at women’s first midwifery appointment, at hospital discharge or through the Maternity Satisfaction Survey.

**Policy alignment:** ACT Wellbeing Framework, Best Start Strategy, Maternity in Focus System Plan 2022-2032, Maternity in Focus First Action Plan 2022-2025.

**Budgetary implications:** Likely little to none, this requires a policy and administrative change in how data is collected and reported through Health and CSD.

## Proposal 4: Homelessness Sector Resourcing and Recognition

The ACT Government's Community Sector Funding Boost (the Boost) has proven welcome and critical to the homelessness sector, and our ability to support vulnerable Canberrans who are homeless, experiencing housing insecurity or are at risk of homelessness. It has enabled services such as Karinya House to manage increased wage and infrastructure costs of operating in the ACT at a time where homelessness in Canberra is increasing (e.g. since December 2024, the number of presentations to homelessness services from women 'at risk' of homelessness has increased 25%). However, the Boost is only committed until 30 June 2026. As with our 2025 Budget Submission, we again encourage the Government to:

- Roll the Boost into recurrent funding allocations for services in FY25/26 (which would subject the Boost to indexation rates) rather than treating the Boost as a separate line, and;
- Extend the Boost beyond 2026<sup>2</sup>.

By way of example, without the additional Boost and the lack of indexation, the annual funding impact beyond 30 June 2026 would be a decrease of around \$100,000 in Karinya House funding. A reduction in ACT Government funding of this amount, would likely impact our staffing profile and may impact our ability to meet demand amongst pregnant and parenting women in the ACT region. Additionally, the Fair Work Commissions decision on 16 April 2025 found that the Social Community Home Care and Disability Services Award 2010 (SCHADS) is impacted by gender undervaluation. If or when the Award is reconfigured to take into account these inequities, charities in the ACT operating under the SCHADS award will be required to adjust compensation for staff. Whilst we welcome the finding that 'caring' industries are underpaid and that this disproportionately affects women, any changes will have significant financial impact for local charities unless supplemented by Government. For example, at Karinya House we estimate the impact may be between \$80-90,000 annually. Extending the boost would help ameliorate these potential impacts for homelessness services operating under the SCHADS Award.

**Policy alignment:** ACT Wellbeing Framework, Best Start Strategy, Housing Strategy (including election commitments relating to social and public housing).

**Budgetary implications:** roll the Boost payment for 2026/27 into baseline funding and subject it to indexation, then continue it for all homelessness services beyond 30 June 2026.

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<sup>2</sup> Also supported by the YWCA in their submission, see [https://www.treasury.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/2992828/11.-YWCA-Canberra.pdf](https://www.treasury.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/2992828/11.-YWCA-Canberra.pdf)