



ACT Government

## BUDGET 2007-2008

*Taking the Territory forward*

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## BUDGET FUNDS IMPROVED RESPONSE TO PUBLIC HEALTH THREATS

The ACT Government will invest more than \$2 million over four years to enhance the ACT's capacity to respond to communicable disease outbreaks, emerging communicable disease threats and to improve hepatitis C treatment.

Health Minister Katy Gallagher said like the rest of Australia the ACT must be prepared to face the possibility of a major public health event such as an influenza pandemic as well as be able to carry out day-to-day functions such as the screening of health care workers from overseas who are being increasingly called upon during the current skill shortage.

"Unfortunately bio-terrorism is another risk we need to be prepared for," Ms Gallagher said.

Ms Gallagher said the funding includes an additional \$210,000 to expand Population Health's staffing capacity to address these issues.

"We need more staff to better monitor immunisation rates in institutions such as nursing homes, and to create capacity to meet the ever-increasing demand for better communicable disease surveillance, investigation and implementation of outbreak control measures," she said.

"The initiative will also allow improvements in communicable disease control planning and operational policy development as well as provide improved capacity for business continuity during outbreaks."

Ms Gallagher said the budget would also see a greater number of Canberrans with hepatitis C accessing and completing treatment which could, depending on the viral genotype, achieve viral eradication in up to 80 per cent of cases.

The ACT has a large hepatitis C infected population. Until the size of this pool is reduced through treatments, a reduction in transmission rates will be difficult to achieve. The hepatitis C program will impact on community organisations such as the ACT Hepatitis C Council and agencies working with injecting drug users.

"The funding will also establish a population health survey program to provide reliable health information specific to the ACT population that can be used for monitoring, policy development and health planning purposes," Ms Gallagher said. "This program will allow for more complex analysis of health data resulting in a greater understanding of health issues facing the ACT."

"It will also allow better communication with relevant health care agencies and, in areas of aged care, child care, and education, in relation to immunisation and communicable disease control."

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