

SUBMISSION

**2025-26
ACT BUDGET
CONSULTATION**

BY

**ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY
CANBERRA/GOULBURN**

FEBRUARY 2025



St Vincent de Paul Society
CANBERRA/GOULBURN

good works

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INTRODUCTION

The St. Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn (the Society) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission as part of the ACT Government's 2025-26 Budget consultation. As an organisation, we seek to address social injustice within our community and have tailored our program delivery around empathy and compassion.

The Society is a member based lay Catholic organisation that has been assisting people experiencing poverty and disadvantage in the region since 1895. We seek to shape a more just and compassionate society by working to address the causes of poverty and injustice, with a focus on prevention and early intervention.

As a registered charitable not for profit organisation, we operate in the Australian Capital Territory and surrounding southern and western regional areas of New South Wales. Volunteer members of the Society's conferences¹ undertake visits to the homes of people experiencing disadvantage, including those at risk of homelessness. Members refer those at risk to our homelessness services, where specialist staff provide case management, support services, and referrals to other agencies to help prevent them becoming homeless.

There are currently 520 Volunteer Members, 1482 Volunteers and 242 Employees working to deliver person-centered assistance to those most in need in our community. We thrive in the partnership we have built with the community and welcome the opportunity to inform the ACT Government's Budget decisions.

BUDGET SUBMISSION & RECOMMENDATION

The Society makes its submission on the thematic areas of Housing, Homelessness, Cost of Living, Climate Energy, Indigenous Justice, Migrants, and People Seeking Asylum.

HOUSING

In its election policy platform, ACT Labor commits to deliver 5,000 additional dwellings to the existing public and community housing stock by the end of 2030². Presently the ACT Government indicates a stock of 11,500 public housing dwellings³. The Productivity Commission's 2025 Report on Government Services (ROGS) however lists 10,952 public housing dwellings as of June 30, 2024. The ROGS further reports a slight decrease in community housing dwellings from 1343 dwellings in 2023 to 1273 dwellings in 2024⁴. Increases to the public housing stock have been observed over the last couple of years. It is important that the ACT Government prioritises this need to increase the supply of affordable housing as prominently featured in the supply and confidence agreement between the Government, the ACT Greens⁵ and Thomas Emerson MLA⁶.

¹ A Conference Member of the Society is a volunteer who joins a conference and attends regular meetings which include scripture discussion, prayer, reflection and how to improve assistance given within the local conference area. A member takes part in the work of the Society providing assistance through charitable works including home visitation.

² ACT Labor 2024 "[30,000 More Homes by 2030](#)" ACT Labor Election Policy Platform. Accessed on February 15, 2025

³ ACT Government, [Increasing Housing in the ACT](#). ACT Government Website. Accessed on February 5, 2025

⁴ Productivity Commission, [Report on Government Services 2025: G Housing and homelessness](#), (Table 18A.3). Productivity Commission, Australian Government, 2024. Accessed 05 February 2025

⁵ ACT Greens, Media Release "[ACT Greens launch four-year plan to champion a better deal for Canberrans](#)" Published on November 6, 2024. Accessed on February 20, 2025

⁶ Thomas Emerson MLA, Media Release "[Independent MLA Thomas Emerson Announces Supply-and-Confidence Agreement with ACT Labor](#)" Published on November 6, 2024. Accessed on February 20, 2025

Between 2020 and 2024, public housing dwellings that are untenable have increased from 137 to 411. This trend is the same with community housing dwellings, where untenable dwellings have increased from 138 in 2020 to 164 in 2024⁷. This leaves a significant number of dwellings that could be available for highly sought-after public housing. The occupancy rate in 2024 is 94.2%. Notably, this is the lowest occupancy rate since 2015 when 98% of public housing dwellings were occupied⁸.

With 2029 applicants⁹ on the waiting list classified as in greatest need, it is important to urgently improve the 41.7 days¹⁰ it takes to turn around vacant public housing stock as of 2024. This will significantly improve the time it takes to get a public housing dwelling for the 29.5% of greatest needs applicants who would otherwise be waitlisted for more than 2 years.¹¹.

Housing expense continues to be significant for most households in the ACT. The proportion of household income spent on rent has a direct impact on the household's financial situations. Only 20.4% of low-income households in public housing spent less than or equal to 20% of their household income on rent¹². The majority (79.6%) spent between 20-25% of their household income on rent, with no household in public housing recorded as spending more than 30% of their household income on rent¹³.

RECOMMENDATION

The Society strongly recommends the following considerations in the 2025-26 ACT Government Budget under the housing thematic area.

Recommendation 1: To Increase the Capacity of Crisis Accommodation Option: *The Society believes that there is an opportunity to develop the Samaritan House site, to increase the number of crisis beds available to those experiencing homelessness. The Society would welcome a consultation to develop this facility to provide more capacity.*

Recommendation 2: Continue to prioritise increasing the existing stock of affordable social housing in the ACT. *Over the next 5 years, we encourage the ACT Government to fast track the delivery the additional 5000 social housing properties it has committed to in its Election platform.*

Recommendation 3: Prioritise the maintenance of Public Housing, *to reduce the growing stock of untenable housing stock and to reduce the turnaround days of vacant public housing.*

⁷ Productivity Commission, [Report on Government Services 2025: G Housing and homelessness](#), (Table 18A.5). Productivity Commission, Australian Government, 2024. Accessed 05 February 2025

⁸ Productivity Commission, [Report on Government Services 2025: G Housing and homelessness](#), (Table 18A.10). Productivity Commission, Australian Government, 2024. Accessed 05 February 2025

⁹ Productivity Commission, [Report on Government Services 2025: G Housing and homelessness](#), (Table 18A.5). Productivity Commission, Australian Government, 2024. Accessed 05 February 2025

¹⁰ Productivity Commission, [Report on Government Services 2025: G Housing and homelessness](#), (Table 18A.14) Productivity Commission, Australian Government, 2024. Accessed 05 February 2025

¹¹ Productivity Commission, [Report on Government Services 2025: G Housing and homelessness](#), (Table 18A.16) Productivity Commission, Australian Government, 2024. Accessed 05 February 2025

¹² Productivity Commission, [Report on Government Services 2025: G Housing and homelessness](#), (Table 18A.25) Productivity Commission, Australian Government, 2024. Accessed 05 February 2025

¹³ Productivity Commission, [Report on Government Services 2025: G Housing and homelessness](#), (Table 18A.25) Productivity Commission, Australian Government, 2024. Accessed 05 February 2025

HOMELESSNESS

In the 2021 Census report, the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that on Census night in the ACT, 1777 people (59% Male; 41% Female) were homeless¹⁴. The number on Census night is conservative if you consider that, the 2023-24 annual report of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) reports specialist homelessness services supporting 4000 clients in 2023-24. This is a steady increase from the 3,800 clients supported in 2021/22 year. It further reports that the majority (73%) of clients who accessed SHS needed accommodation. This in context explains why housing affordability stress (53%) and housing crisis (49%) are among the 3 topmost reasons clients sought SHS. Increasing the stock of affordable housing will make a considerable impact on the work of SHS, who assisted 9 in 10 clients at risk of homelessness to maintain housing and assisted 45% of the 1,200 clients who began 2023–24 on homeless support into housing¹⁵.

The age and gender dynamics of homelessness support recipients were highlighted in the 2025 Reports of Government Services (RoGS). For the age cohort 55 years and over, females constituted 96% of the support given towards family and domestic violence assistance, whereas males constituted 77.8% of the mental health services recipients¹⁶. The importance of funding support services that consider age and gender identities cannot be overstated. Without SHS assistance, 71.5% of SHS clients at risk of homelessness would not have received support to prevent them becoming homeless in 2023-24¹⁷.

Recent observations by some business owners in Canberra's central business district have highlighted the complexities involved in supporting individuals experiencing homelessness¹⁸. The ACT Government and community stakeholders should aim to improve the outcomes of the 22.9% of clients who in 2023-24 did not have their accommodation needs met¹⁹. This is especially crucial given that 42.6% (1034) of SHS clients are experiencing persistent homelessness²⁰. For specialist homelessness services to be able to respond to everyone in need of assistance, and to provide the professional level of support required, the sector requires a significant increase of new funding into those services. Reviewing how the sector is funded to take into account the growth in salaries, population and complexity of client needs as proposed in the supply and confidence agreements^{21,22} referenced in the earlier section should be a priority in this budget.

¹⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021), *Estimating Homelessness: Census*, ABS Website, accessed 17 January 2024.

¹⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2025) *Specialist Homelessness Services 2023–24: Australian Capital Territory*, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 06 February 2025.

¹⁶ Productivity Commission, *Report on Government Services 2024: G Housing and homelessness*, (Table 19A.5) Productivity Commission, Australian Government, 2024. Accessed 05 February 2025

¹⁷ Productivity Commission, *Report on Government Services 2024: G Housing and homelessness*, (Table 19A.34) Productivity Commission, Australian Government, 2024. Accessed 05 February 2025

¹⁸ James Coleman *"It has definitely got worse": Businesses don't know what to do about Civic's homeless* Riotact. 16 February 2025. Accessed on 20 February 2025

¹⁹ Productivity Commission, *Report on Government Services 2024: G Housing and homelessness*, (Table 19A.11) Productivity Commission, Australian Government, 2024. Accessed 05 February 2025

²⁰ Productivity Commission, *Report on Government Services 2024: G Housing and homelessness*, (Table 19A.43) Productivity Commission, Australian Government, 2024. Accessed 05 February 2025

²¹ Thomas Emerson MLA, Media Release *"Independent MLA Thomas Emerson Announces Supply-and-Confidence Agreement with ACT Labor"* Published on November 6, 2024. Accessed on February 20, 2025

²² ACT Greens, Media Release *"ACT Greens launch four-year plan to champion a better deal for Canberrans"* Published on November 6, 2024. Accessed on February 20, 2025

In the 6-month period between 1 July and 31 December 2024, our Blue Door Drop-in Centre²³ provided 15,480 free meals. During the same period, The Roadhouse Drop-in Centre supported 4155 attendees, providing 4,765 meals and 1,103 items of material aid. The Vinnies Night Patrol Service attended to 7281 people, distributing 12,748 within the same period. The demand for emergency relief support continues to increase, and in the same period 22% of our total emergency relief provided was for food and grocery items.

Through the delivery of our front-line programs, the Society observes the increasing numbers of Canberrans who are dealing with the issues of loneliness and social isolation. From families with both parents working yet needing support from charities to make ends meet, to individuals isolating as a response of being at risk of homelessness and those dealing with mental health complexities, there is an urgent need to prioritise funding to address loneliness and social isolation in the ACT. The Society notes the Legislative Assembly's Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation in the ACT²⁴. The Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion made 28 recommendations in its report, 15 of which the ACT Government noted.

RECOMMENDATION

The Society strongly recommends the following considerations in the 2025-26 ACT Government Budget under the homelessness thematic area.

Recommendation 4: Review funding for the community sector as committed in the Supply and Confidence Agreements with the ACT Greens and Thomas Emerson MLA; to reflect in the 2025-26 budget and future budgets; and to account for growth in salaries, population and complexity of client need.

Recommendation 5: Continued Funding for SHS Programs: The Society currently receives funding for several SHS including Samaritan House, Street to Home, Roadhouse and Blue Door. The funding for these programs ceases at the end of September 2025. We recommend that they be given ongoing and properly costed funding to enable us to continue to provide these critical services and cater to the increased demand.

Recommendation 6: Provide Onsite Case Management: We encourage the ACT Government to consider the provision of on-site case management and social support services in local multi-unit public housing dwellings including Jerilderie Court (62 units), Kanangra Court (78 units). The co-location of significant numbers of public housing units in these estates presents a wide range of challenges, with the vast majority of tenants only receiving tenancy support with no access to case management and social support services. We believe that the service delivery model provided by the Society and funded by the ACT Government currently operating on-site in Oaks Estate provides significant benefits for tenants.

Recommendation 7: Renovate the Ainslie Village²⁵: The dining hall and commercial kitchen at Ainslie Village require renovation. These substantial areas are currently closed due to damage and disrepair. Both the dining hall area and the commercial kitchen could be utilized to substantially increase the food and engagement services work of both the Society and Argyle Housing on the site.

²³ The St. Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn, [The Blue Door Program](#). Accessed on February 16, 2025




²⁴ Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory "[Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation in the ACT](#)" The Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion. Report Published on August 27, 2024. Accessed on February 26, 2025

²⁵ Argyle Housing, [Ainslie Village](#), Accessed on February 20, 2025



Recommendation 8: Prioritise Funding to address Loneliness and Social Isolation. Prioritise and fund all recommendations not yet in existing government policy as put forward by The Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion in its report from the Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation in the ACT.

Recommendation 9: Continue and increase Funding for Food and Engagement Services: The Society supports the call in the “Food Insecurity In The Canberra Region: A strategic Picture” report for the ACT Government to provide sustainable funding to the food relief sector in the ACT. The report has 7 recommendations, and we advocate the ACT Government to prioritise them²⁶.



1. The ACT Government must provide sustainable funding to the food relief sector including:

-  ongoing funding for the coordination of the Food Relief Network currently managed by VolunteeringACT; and
-  expanding the current funding from freight subsidy only, to ongoing base level funding to ACT food relief services including street pantries and enabling organisations; and
-  considering how the food relief sector is included in commissioning or other funding processes.

2. The ACT Government must:

-  continue to provide sustainable funding to enable food relief network actors to source sufficient quality food to meet demand; and
-  introduce incentives aimed at the ACT retail and hospitality industry that encourage food donation and discourage edible food waste going to landfill and where the cost of food rescue remains with the producers of food waste rather than being a burden for food relief service providers.

3. The ACT Government must:

-  provide funding for the provision and upgrading of storage facilities for donated goods prior to distribution to local pantries and other services; and
-  support the consistent training and management of volunteers involved in the food relief sector.

Source: Volunteering ACT “Food Insecurity In The Canberra Region: A strategic Picture” report

COST OF LIVING, ENERGY AND CLIMATE SMART MEASURES

In its 2024-25 ACT Budget, the ACT Government announced several relief measures aimed at addressing the cost-of-living crisis being experienced by Canberrans²⁷. However, since July 2023, ACT households have seen a \$265 increment in their annual gas costs²⁸. In July 2024, electricity bills were increased by \$240 for Canberran households²⁹, which reduced the full impact of the \$300 Federal Government energy payment to each Canberran household³⁰.

²⁶ Volunteering ACT “[Food Insecurity In The Canberra Region: A strategic Picture](#)” Volunteering ACT Website. Accessed on 05 February 2025.

²⁷ Andrew Barr, MLA “[Cost-of-living relief for Canberrans](#)” ACT Government Media Release 25 June 2024. Accessed 05 February 2025.

²⁸ St Vincent de Paul Society, [ACT Energy Prices 2024](#), (Report, July 2024) Accessed 05 February 2025

²⁹ Lottie Twyford “[Canberra households to pay an extra \\$240 a year on electricity bills after 12.75 per cent price hike approved on standing offer](#)” ABC News. 23 May 2024. Accessed on 05 February 2025

³⁰ ACT Government “[Energy Bill Relief Fund: 2024-25](#)” ACT Revenue Office Website. Accessed on 05 February 2025

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the National Consumer Price Index (CPI)³¹ over the 12 months to December 2024 rose by 2.4%, and the Through the Year (TTY) CPI for Canberra recorded a 2.2% increment. Canberra's CPI in the December quarter of 2024 was driven by increases in prices of tobacco (5.8%), domestic holiday travel and accommodation (2.5%), restaurant meals (1.4%) and new dwelling purchases by owner-occupiers (1.0%)³².

The typical annual gas bill for households is between \$1709 and \$2514, depending on the retailer used. This price is expected to increase sharply in the years leading up to 2045 – ACT's target for transitioning households off gas³³. The average all electric ACT household has also seen bill increases of 13% since July 2023³⁴. Cost of living concerns remain a major media and political item across the ACT as it is in Australia³⁵.

Rental affordability across the ACT in 2024 is classified as acceptable in the 2024 Rental Affordability Index. This is not the case for low-income earners and students for whom the ACT is among the most unaffordable rental markets³⁶. The introduction of minimum ceiling insulation standards in the ACT has not had any observable impacts on rental market prices or supply. While many ACT renters have reported benefiting from these standards, many have also expressed concern over the reliance placed on renters to enforce these standards, due to risks such as landlord retaliation.³⁷

Programs that support low-income households in managing their energy consumption have a tremendous impact on their living standards. The Society delivers the Household Energy Efficiency Program (HEEP) which is one such program, and between January 1, 2024, and December 31, 2024, the HEEP program has assisted 1,142 households in the ACT and provided 729 households with a home energy assessment, energy efficiency education and retrofit. The program installed draught sealing for 713 households, 1865 curtains for 268 clients and distributed 724 heated throw rugs. Within the period, 404 Housing ACT and 166 Community Housing tenants were served by the program, and 24 low-income owner-occupier households were provided with Scorecard energy star ratings.

Additionally, the collaboration between the Society and Care Financial Counselling Service³⁸ on the Energy Assistance Community Partnership Program (EACP) enables our teams to deliver energy literacy training to the most vulnerable people in the community. By adopting the "Train the Trainer" approach, other community organisations and energy retailers are positioned to better support the most vulnerable in the ACT.

The Energy Bill Relief Fund³⁹ provides energy bill credit for people in hardship. Our team has observed that 50-60% of vouchers submitted by low-income families for this relief are rejected by energy retailers. We have observed that participants sacrifice expenditures on other essentials to maintain a credit in their account so they can continue to get the energy supply.

³¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (Sep-quarter-2024), [Consumer Price Index, Australia](#), ABS Website, accessed 9 January 2025.

³² ACT Government "[Consumer Price Index \(CPI\) – December Quarter 2024](#)" Released on 29 January 2025. Accessed on 14 February 2025

³³ St Vincent de Paul Society, [ACT Energy Prices 2024](#), (Report, July 2024) Accessed 05 February 2025

³⁴ St Vincent de Paul Society, [ACT Energy Prices 2024](#), (Report, July 2024) Accessed 05 February 2025

³⁵ H Frost, "[The cost of living is dominating ACT politics. Can the government ease the pain?](#)", *The ABC News*, 12 Feb 2023, accessed on 21 April 2023.

³⁶ SGS Economics and Planning, "[Rental Affordability Index](#)" Published on November 2024. Accessed on February 12, 2025

³⁷ Rowan Bedggood et al, [Assessing Energy Inequity and the Distributional Effects of Energy Policies](#) (Report, 2021) 5, 48

³⁸ <https://www.carefcs.org/about>

³⁹ <https://www.revenue.act.gov.au/community-assistance/energy-bill-relief-fund>

RECOMMENDATION

To address this energy poverty, the Society advocates to support those most in need in particular Housing ACT households, those supported by government concession cards and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households. In addition, the specific recommendations below will make a positive impact on the lives of families dealing with this energy poverty amidst the high cost of living.

Recommendation 10: Continue Funding Home Energy Efficiency Program: *The Society advocates the ACT government continues funding for the Home Energy Efficiency Program and the Energy Assistance Community Partnership Program (EACP). The ACT is a leader in understanding the importance of working towards positive climate change, and the funding helps us reach those vulnerable households.*

Recommendation 11: Re-assess the administration and application of the Energy Bill Relief Fund: *Based on the high rejection rates as observed by the Society's teams towards the low-income families seeking to apply the \$300 relief, the Society advocates the ACT Government to re-assess the role of community sector organisations and energy retailers in this important relief fund.*

PEOPLE SEEKING ASYLUM

The ACT joined the Safe Haven Enterprise Visa Scheme (SHEV)⁴⁰ in 2016 and this has allowed people who arrived in Australia without a visa and seeking asylum, to live, work and study here temporarily for 5 years⁴¹. As the waiting period between applying for protection visas and seeking asylum can be lengthy, the Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS)⁴² has been an avenue of support from the Federal Government in support of people seeking asylum.

Unfortunately, the current Federal Government has continued the harsh policy of the previous Federal Government by severely limiting the eligibility of SRSS to these asylum seekers, leaving thousands of people across Australia and at least 50 households in the ACT in destitution.

Since 2018 the Society has partnered with Companion House, and Canberra Refugee Support to assist these vulnerable people. We are grateful for the ACT Government's Discretionary Funding Support⁴³ to complement our own funding. Since 2021, an annual allocation of \$195,000 has been generously provided by the ACT Government as discretionary funding for asylum seekers, primarily those eligible for the ACT Access Card and who are not in receipt of any other income. Unfortunately for FY 2024-25 this figure was reduced to \$150,000 while the need has increased.

This funding forms an essential part of support jointly delivered with the three community organisations. In the absence of Federal Government funding, and without ACT funding, the three organisations will be unable to sustain the level of support we are currently providing to this vulnerable group of people for any length of time. The reduction of \$45,000 in FY 2024-25 meant that the three organisations contributed that amount in addition to the funding we were already providing

⁴⁰ Rachel Stephen-Smith, MLA "[ACT Strengthens Efforts to Welcome Refugees](#)" ACT Government Media Release. Published on 22 June 2017. Accessed on January 31, 2024.

⁴¹ Australian Government. "[Safe Haven Enterprise Visa: Subclass 790](#)" Department of Home Affairs Website. Accessed on January 31, 2024

⁴² Refugee Council of Australia "[Status Resolution Support Services](#)" Accessed on January 31, 2024.

⁴³ RASH Coordination Committee. "[Seeking Rash Coordination Committee's Feedback on Discretionary Funding Support To Act Services Access Card Holders ACT](#)" Office for Multicultural Affairs. Community Services Directorate. Published on 233 Marh, 2022. Accessed on 31 January 2024

to these people. In order to continue to provide the same level of support, the three agencies estimate a requirement of \$210,000 in ACT Government funding in FY 2025-26.⁴⁴

RECOMMENDATION

To continue to appropriately support asylum seekers in our community, the Society advocates the ACT Government to continue their support through the discretionary funds.

Recommendation 12: Continue to provide the Discretionary Funding: The Society advocates the ACT Government to provide discretionary funding at the level of \$210,000 for the FY 2025-26. This is based on the understanding that this level of funding would reduce appropriately if and when the Federal Government implements substantially improved SRSS funding and eligibility.

MIGRANT AND REFUGEES

In the 2021 Census report⁴⁵, the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that on census night, 28.7% of the 454,000 residents in the ACT were born overseers. 1 in 3 people in the ACT come from a culturally diverse background. There were nearly 200 different nationalities⁴⁶ resident in the ACT, with Canberra officially being declared a “Refugee Welcome Zone⁴⁷” in 2015. The ACT Government officially joined the Welcoming Cities Network in 2019, solidifying its intention to creating a city where everyone can belong and participate⁴⁸.

The Society’s Migrant and Refugee Program is a Settlement Engagement Transition Support (SETS) provider and offers a range of services and programs to children, young people and their families. This includes our In School Support program, where volunteers visit schools to work one on one with students who need additional support with their learning. The program continues to grow at a rapid pace due to high number of students requiring support.

In 2024, we supported over 80 students per week across 14 schools, which is an increase of over 100% since 2023. This growing need for our volunteers speaks to the fact that schools are severely underfunded in the provision of support for EALD (English as Additional Language or Dialect) students. Most schools with a high number of EALD students only have one part time EALD teacher, who is not able to provide the intensive support that many of these students require, particularly those who have had interruptions to their schooling due to their refugee experience.

As these students reach adolescence, they face even greater challenges with regard to the demands of the academic curriculum which becomes much more complex and also requires considerable cultural understanding, often not explicitly taught. The need for EALD teachers and effective EALD programs increases. In addition to this, the challenges young people encounter as they navigate adolescence and seek to clarify their own identity also increase. They typically experience significant conflict between the cultural expectations of their families and the freedoms they seek as they work

⁴⁴ Acute Rental Support Coordinating Committee (ARSCC) [ACT Budget Submission 2025-26](#). Accessed on February 12, 2025.

⁴⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (28 June 2022), [Snapshot of Australian Capital Territory](#), ABS Website, accessed 31 January 2024.

⁴⁶ Yvette Berry, MLA Ginninderra “[Australia’s capital city officially declared a refugee welcome zone](#)” published on 18 June 2015. Accessed on January 31, 2024.

⁴⁷ *A Refugee Welcome Zone is a local government area which has made a commitment to welcoming refugees into the community, upholding their human rights, demonstrating compassion for refugees and enhancing cultural and religious diversity in the community.*

⁴⁸ ACT Government. “[Canberra accredited as an Advanced Welcoming City](#)” Published on 30 July 2023. Accessed on 31 January 2024.

towards independence in a very different cultural context. Alongside academic tutoring, one on one mentoring can be an effective tool to assist young people as they negotiate high school and adolescence.

We reiterate the fact that there needs to be greater support for newly arrived families to better understand the ACT education systems, including the supports available to students and their families in the public, Catholic and Independent school systems. For example, IEC (Introductory English Centres) are only available to students enrolled in the public system, not the Catholic and independent schools. This is critical information that parents should know about before they enroll their children in school.

We have also observed the immense impact that limited access to affordable housing has on the cohort of refugees who interface with our program. Many in this cohort rely on Centrelink payments while working to improve their English to secure employment. This process takes time and can lead to newly arrived individuals and families struggling. Many newcomers struggle to find jobs due to language barriers and unfamiliarity with local hiring practices. Even those proficient in English often find their qualifications and experience unrecognised, forcing them to abandon their professions and take up work in industries such as Uber, construction, or hospitality. The combination of housing insecurity and unemployment leaves many in severe financial distress, with no choice but to seek emergency relief. Unfortunately, most find it deeply embarrassing to ask for financial assistance.

RECOMMENDATION

Recommendation 13: Increase EALD funding for schools. *We request that schools with a high number of students from a migrant or refugee background are provided with additional funding, so there is at least one qualified full-time EALD teacher.*

Recommendation 14: Provide better support for parents about ACT school system, including enrolment: *A key area of challenge common to parents who are migrants, refugees or seeking asylum is the ability to quickly understand the educational system in Australia. This has a lot of influence on how their children enroll into schools and access support services available to them. The Society therefore advocates for more support services around the educational system for parents of these backgrounds. This can be tied into existing services currently being delivered as part of the commitment under the Refugee Welcome Zone initiative.*

Recommendation 15: Provide specific support and funding to enable the Society to set up, manage and oversee an effective mentor program for high school students.

Recommendation 16: Allocate more affordable housing units to cater for the needs of refugees. This will provide the stability for families and will have an immense impact in the settlement process of refugees in our community.

INDIGENOUS JUSTICE

Census data in 2021 estimate that 2% of the population in ACT identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander with nearly half (40.4%) of that population being between 5-24 years⁴⁹. With such a young and youthful population, it is worrying that nearly a third (30%) of children in out of home care

⁴⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (1 July 2022), [Australian Capital Territory: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population summary](#), ABS Website, accessed 13 February 2025.

as of December 2023 came from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander families⁵⁰. Essentially, the establishment of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children & Young People Commissioner's Office⁵¹ becomes an important step in addressing some of the systemic issues that perpetuate this phenomenon.

The data indicates an over-representation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the prison system in the ACT. Whereas among the general population, prison population increased by 12% between 30 June 2023 to 30 June 2024, a 31% increase was recorded within the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander prison population⁵². On daily average, 29% of prisoner population in the ACT in 2023-24, identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, representative of an increase from the 2021-22 percentage of 26.1%⁵³.

"There has been little change since 2017 in prior imprisonment with nearly nine in every ten First Nations men in prison in the ACT having been previously imprisoned. The percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on remand in the ACT in 2023 was 49%. This was higher than the national average for First Nations people on remand which was 41%"⁵⁴.

Putting measures in place to address the high rate of recidivism will have positive impact on the 44.3% adults who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, who according to the data are likely to return to prison with a new sentence within two years⁵⁵. To this end, the establishment of the independent review into the over-representation of First Nations People in the justice system in the ACT is a positive step forward⁵⁶.

RECOMMENDATION

Recommendation 17: Continue to prioritise and implement the 28 Recommendations from the "Our Booris, Our Way Report"

Recommendation 18: Continue to prioritise actions that Seek to Reform Justice and Prison Systems particularly as captured in the Australian Law Reform Commission's "Pathways to Justice Report" in response to the Inquiry into the Incarceration Rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Recommendation 18: Continue to resource the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children & Young People Commissioner's Office to deliver on its mandate

Recommendation 19: Explore a Cross Border Justice Scheme⁵⁷ with the NSW Government. This has the potential of improving the rehabilitation measures implemented with the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC).

⁵⁰ ACT Government, [Our Booris, Our Way Six Monthly Report July to December 2023](#) ACT Government Community Service Website, accessed on February 13, 2025

⁵¹ ACT Government, ["ACT Office for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People"](#) ACT Government Website, accessed on February 13, 2025

⁵² Australian Bureau of Statistics (2024), [Prisoners in Australia](#), ABS Website, accessed 13 February 2025.

⁵³ Productivity Commission, [Report on Government Services 2025: Corrective Services](#): Table 8A.4. Productivity Commission, Australian Government, 2024. Accessed 05 February 2025.

⁵⁴ Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, ["Independent Review into the Overrepresentation of First Nations People in the ACT Criminal Justice System"](#) August 2024. University of Technology Sydney. Accessed on February 13, 2025

⁵⁵ Productivity Commission, [Report on Government Services 2025: Justice Sector Overview](#): Table CA.4: Productivity Commission, Australian Government, 2024. Accessed 05 February 2025.

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CONTACT DETAILS

GENERAL ENQUIRIES

Phone: (02) 6282 2722

Email: info.cg@vinnies-cg.org.au

ENQUIRIES ON SOCIAL JUSTICE ADVOCACY

Email: Kwadwo.Owusu@vinnies-cg.org.au

Mobile: 0491 022 398

vinnies.org.au/act-surrounds/advocacy

2 Loch Street, Yarralumla, ACT, 2600

PO Box 9091, Deakin, ACT, 2600

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