

# Kidsafe ACT Funding Proposal to the ACT Government

Kidsafe ACT is the leading local charity focused on child accident prevention. We exist to help to make the world safer for kids. Our belief is that Canberra should be the safest place in the country to be a child and to raise a child - a goal we believe is possible to achieve.

For a while now, the organisation has been focused on keeping its head above water. This has meant that a disproportionate amount of time and effort needs to be dedicated to securing streams of funding, rather than on frontline program development and delivery.

Unfortunately, Kidsafe ACT is on track to potentially close by the end of the year due to funding constraints. While a portion of our revenue comes from service provision and sales, this is nowhere near sufficient to cover even partial expenses, meaning that an investment from the government is needed. Given that Kidsafe delivers a critical public service that helps to keep children alive and away from emergency rooms, that support through public funding is justifiable. Kidsafe was deemed an essential service by ACT Health that was allowed to remain open during lockdown throughout COVID. This demonstrates the importance of our work to the community and how detrimental an absence of our services would be.

Every serious childhood accident - especially those that result in injury or death - create a ripple impact of trauma that lasts a lifetime. As Macquarie University experts have asserted, childhood injury is a 'costly public health issue in Australia', even though it's 'preventable'. Injuries related to falls, as well as transport-related injuries, were the 'costliest injury mechanisms', with a mean cost of treatment per injured child standing at over \$3,000 each.<sup>1</sup> Data shows that over \$2 billion was spent caring for injured children between 2002 and 2012, a figure that would be higher today. Reflecting the ripple effect on mental health, around half of parents suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) following serious injury to their child.<sup>2</sup>

Evidence shows that around 90% of car seats currently in use are ill-fitted or not fit for purpose, such as being broken or out of date. In some cases, the child seat can actually exacerbate the injury or risk of death in the event of a crash. However, a correctly-fitted seat gives a child a 70% better chance of surviving a crash unharmed. Given that Kidsafe ACT conducts thousands of consultations every year, and given that there were over 1,100 car accidents across the nation in 2023, it's inevitable that a life will have been saved specifically because of our work<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [research-management.mq.edu.au/ws/portalfiles/portal/93443084/Publisher\\_version\\_open\\_access\\_.pdf](https://research-management.mq.edu.au/ws/portalfiles/portal/93443084/Publisher_version_open_access_.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-13/child-injuries-cost-australia-\\$2-billion-in-10-years:-study/8612938](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-13/child-injuries-cost-australia-$2-billion-in-10-years:-study/8612938)

<sup>3</sup> [www.canberratimes.com.au/story/8487519/australias-catastrophic-2023-road-toll-laid-bare](https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/8487519/australias-catastrophic-2023-road-toll-laid-bare)

## Recurrent funding

We are proposing an increase of recurrent funding, with the existing terms of the contract with ACT Health, to \$400,000 per year. This is a modest figure, and one which is less than 5% of the funding that will be provided to the horse racing industry next financial year, and is only slightly more than the increase that that industry receives every year of its agreement.

The present conditions are causing staff to work in potentially unsafe conditions and be underpaid. Many are having to balance multiple roles, especially when short-staffed. On some days, the difficult situation arises whereby a staff member is by themselves. Although working alone is not ideal, the alternative is to cancel bookings for the day, meaning that children are being transported unsafely. One of the common reasons for walk-ins is following a car service, where the mechanic has taken out the car seat. This presents an immediate danger to a child unless it is rectified straight away, and could result in a death if not.

This funding would enable Kidsafe to:

- Cover all operational costs, which have increased substantially since 2015;
- Expand opening hours, both during the week and on Saturdays, as well as being able to offer home safety consultations by Zoom or telephone;
- Enhancing staff salaries to fair, competitive rates as they deserve;
- Hiring two part-time Kidsafe Officers, for services such as consultations on car seats;
- Creating a new part-time position of Child Safety Program Coordinator - modeled on the [role within other Kidsafe branches](#) - whose role it would be to manage education, community partnerships, outreach and advocacy efforts, such as the proposed schools program;
- Purchase, registration, insurance and maintenance of a replacement second-hand van;
- Presence at child-focused community events such as the Baby Expo and school fetes;
- Ability to present at all new parent talks at MACH Clinics and Winnunga Nimmityjah;
- Update our printed and online resources about child safety, including having them translated in different languages and making them inclusive for people who are blind or deaf;
- Deliver more public programs, such as Grandparents' and Carers' Information Sessions;
- Capacity to assist with initiatives, such as providing a representative on Standards Australia committees as they review and update Australian Standards on child-related goods; and
- Higher quality and more social media awareness campaigns about child safety.

Staff are paid based on the General Retail Industry Award level for part-time employees. When working evenings or Saturdays, staff would be offered 25% extra, consistent with the operation of the pay rates in the Award. Superannuation would also be increased to 15% from 10.50% per annum and the rate of pay would increase by 3% annually, in accordance with inflation.

Team members are currently paid a wage which is not reflective of the importance of their work, the skills and training required, nor the physical nature. At present, Kidsafe Officers earn around 25% less than a Retail Assistant at Baby Bunting, a situation which is no longer tenable but an outcome of our insufficient funding. There is a risk that we'll be unable to retain these staff.

<b>Position</b>	<b>Salary (level) now</b>	<b>Proposed minimum salary (level)</b>
Receptionist	\$24.73 (1)	\$26.18 (4)
Kidsafe Officer	\$25.29 (2)	\$32.73 (4 Saturday)
Assistant Manager / Program Coordinator	\$27.66 (6)	\$37.78 (8 Saturday)
Manager	\$35.66 (8 + 18%)	\$45.33 (8 Sunday)

As the table shows, these proposed increases are modest and the least that the staff deserve. Our second-hand furniture was donated, with some of it broken, and the office space was once the storage room for an art classroom. The carpet is over 20 years old. We would be looking to undertake some very modest improvements so that the workspace is more conducive for staff wellbeing and safety. It is notable that another charity spent \$1.5 million on a complete overhaul; our updates would be miniscule in comparison.

With Canberra expected to grow to approximately half a million by 2030, the necessity for further investment into child accident prevention is becoming more pronounced.

Kidsafe ACT also seeks recognition that we:

- Deliver a critical, life-saving public service to the ACT community;
- Offer decades of experience and a unique expertise;
- Contribute to the health and safety of Canberran children;
- Save considerable costs to the health system and prevent trauma to families; and thus,
- Require sufficient government funding to not just stay open, but to effectively operate.

## Kidsafe North Canberra

As the Kidsafe Centre is currently in Pearce, many families are having to travel long distances in order to access our services. For instance, the Taylor Early Learning Centre - an area which has a considerable number of young families - is over 30 kilometers away. For families in the area to visit us for a consultation, it often involves them having to take a period of leave off work.

To improve access for families across northern Canberra, especially West Belconnen, Gungahlin and the Molonglo Valley where there is a high concentration of new families, Kidsafe ACT proposes to establish a permanent drop-in centre at North Canberra hospital, akin to the facility at the Women's and Children's Hospital in Adelaide. According to this Hospital, it allows Kidsafe to provide a 'direct support service to parents and carers on all aspects of child safety and injury prevention'. This would be mainly focused on providing an information service about child safety to families around the time of their little one's birth, meaning that they receive this information before the baby is taken home for the first time.

All that would be needed is provision of a small room, similar to the one in Adelaide pictured henceforth. With the increase in recurrent funding, Kidsafe will be able to assign an expert Kidsafe Officer to the drop-in centre on a part-time basis. Furthermore, families could purchase home safety equipment and make bookings for car seat installations. Ideally, an undercover car space could also be provided, so that fittings for premature babies - or 'premmies' - can be offered. This would ensure that the specific requirements for a premature baby can be tailored to that particular seat, meaning that the baby can get home safely.

An additional site - which would be dependent on funding - would be for a Kidsafe Centre to be established in Mitchell. This would be a replica of the Kidsafe Centre in Pearce - offering the full suite of services, such as car seat installations - and make it a lot more accessible for families in northern Canberra, as the area falls in the middle of Belconnen, Gungahlin and the Inner North. [Suitable warehouses](#) are available for around \$25,000 (+ GST and bills) per annum.



*Left: Kidsafe Centre at the Women's and Children's Hospital in Adelaide.*

*Right: Potential Kidsafe Centre in northern Canberra.*

## Education Program

Kidsafe ACT would like to develop and deliver an education program focused on safety at home, school and play. It would enhance positive safety behavioural choices through guidance and awareness. It would be curriculum-aligned for each year level, be co-designed with Canberra educators and feature best-practice pedagogy.

Although focused on the topic of child accident prevention, it would be similar to fun, participatory educational programs such as Constable Koala and Healthy Harold.

It is our vision that every Canberran child participates in at least one Kidsafe Safety Session before they reach Year 3. This will have a clear, beneficial impact on accident prevention. For instance, they will be aware of the dangers of swallowing button batteries, running out onto a driveway without looking, and jumping off a playground from height; a subsequent desire to avoid serious injuries will encourage them to make safer choices.

Proposed annual cost of this initiative would be \$50,000, in order to cover every preschool, Early Learning Centre (ELC) and Primary School at least once per year, with an aim to run at least 250 sessions every year as some ELCs and schools would require multiple visits.

Deliverables for the project include:

- Initial program scoping and development;
- Recruitment, training and support for Kidsafe Education Officers;
- Every ACT Government ELC and Primary School to be visited at least once per year; and
- Ongoing evaluation and improvements to pedagogy and curriculum alignment.

It is a possibility for the role to be split between students of Early Childhood Education and Primary Teaching at the University of Canberra and Australian Catholic University, so that they can also gain some valuable paid experience in front of a classroom.

An initial call for expressions of interest was made earlier in 2024, and several schools expressed interest in hosting a program at their School. There is clearly demand, and there would be significantly more if it could be offered without cost to the School or ELC.

This project would be developed and tested throughout 2024, with full-scale implementation to occur from 2025 onwards.

## Transport Safety Promotion

For an investment of \$100,000, Canberran children would be made much safer on the road.

This would reduce the likelihood of child injury or death in the case of a car accident, which would - in addition to the human benefit - save the Motor Accident Injuries Commission and Canberra Health Services a considerable amount of money and resources. Research has demonstrated the thousands of dollars of cost imposed on the health system every time a child is seriously injured - money that is better directed elsewhere.

Specifically, Kidsafe ACT would like to:

- Work with Canberra Multicultural Hub to engage with people from asylum seeker/refugee backgrounds and those from non-English speaking backgrounds;
- Facilitate training workshops for local organisations that transport children - including children with a disability - such as Uniting, Life Without Barriers and Sharing Places;
- Arrange for pop-up sites for free car seat consultations across Canberra, working with local community partners such as Lions and Rotary Clubs;
- Offer discounted and subsidised child car seats and safety products to families in need;
- Provide unlimited free car seat checks and adjustments at the Kidsafe Centre; and
- Collect and collate results and data to be provided to Transport Canberra, and also contribute to academic research to update best practice.

Part of the costing takes into consideration the reduced income that Kidsafe would receive by providing chargeable consultations for free. This would make sure that provision of these free services would not inhibit other areas of operations.

At present, there is a capacity constraint on how many free checks and adjustments can be offered to the community. Furthermore, there is no ability to be able to set up temporary sites across Canberra for initiatives such as 'Free Fitting Fridays', given that we cannot afford a replacement car and we're understaffed. These initiatives would provide a clear benefit to the community by directly helping to prevent serious injuries and death.

As the Canberra Times noted, Kidsafe ACT is a 'rite of passage' for local parents. However, we don't want that to mean 'only for parents that can afford it'. We are of the fundamental belief that every child deserves a life of safety, good health and happiness. That's why we're passionate

about child accident prevention. Furthermore, we further believe that socioeconomic status should not - and need not - be an impediment to achievement of that mission. Our experience shows that this is currently the case; that families with the financial means are able to purchase quality car seats and have them installed correctly, while those in financial difficulty often use donated seats they are sometimes broken and incorrectly fitted. The inevitable - and unfortunate - result is that these children are placed at greater risk.

This proposal addresses the under-resourcing of already underprivileged members of the community, and ensures that they are included in measures to promote child safety. The costs of car seats and their installation can be a barrier to many, which is why lack of economic means can directly impact a child's safety and expose them to risk - an unacceptable outcome. The funding will provide us with the capacity to find the 'hard to reach' members of our community, ensuring that their children will be safe in the car.

Examples of the types of free services that are offered in other jurisdictions are included below.



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## Conclusion

To ensure that this doesn't result in a real-terms funding cut over the medium term - as is the case with the current funding model - this should be indexed to inflation. Furthermore, so as to provide certainty for Kidsafe ACT, it is requested for this funding to be a five-year commitment, with the final year being the end of the Financial Year 2029/30.

As previously indicated, around half of parents (a figure that is likely higher) are diagnosed with PTSD following serious injury to their child. By reducing this number, the exposure to potential psychosocial injury to health and emergency service personnel would be prevented. For example, for the nurse who is desperately trying to save a baby who has swallowed a button battery or the paramedic trying to stem catastrophic bleeding in a child takes a toll emotionally.

- ★ Enhanced access to better services for families across Canberra, especially northside;
- ★ More inclusive safety information and awareness for families; and
- ★ Promotion of positive safety behaviours directly to children through education.

*The overall result: children will be safer in the car, at home, at school and during leisure.*

The natural conclusion is that prevention strategies deliver a significant cost reduction to the already strained health system, in addition to the trauma and hardship on both the child and their loved ones that result from childhood injury. We are calling on present and future ACT Governments to prioritise child accident prevention, not just partially, but substantially. The closure of Kidsafe ACT - which is the current trajectory - would have a catastrophic impact.

Kidsafe ACT is working to strengthen the business aspect of its operation - we're a social enterprise in addition to a charity. However, this will continue to take time to develop and still only cover a portion of total operating costs. Given that Kidsafe ACT delivers a critical public service, the ACT Government will always be the main partner. Our return on investment in human and financial terms is considerable.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this proposal and we look forward to working together to #KeepKidsafe so that we can Keep Kids Safe.

*To consciously underfund Kidsafe ACT is to proactively put Canberran children at risk, and to expose families and communities to unnecessary trauma and hardship.*