



No. 32

Budget focus on Canberra's homeless

Homeless Canberrans will benefit from a \$2.5 million investment by the ACT Government towards the construction of 20 purpose-built homes, and a further \$750,000 to refurbish and expand Pilgrim House's drop-in centre which provides essential services to the city's most needy.

ACT Minister for Housing and Community Services, Joy Burch, said the homes would be constructed across the city as part of the joint ACT-Commonwealth homelessness initiative, *A Place to Call Home*, which will receive a combined \$10 million in funding through the Homelessness National Partnership Agreement.

The ACT Government invested \$2.5 million in *A Place to Call Home* in 2008-09 and under the funding agreement the Commonwealth will match the ACT's \$5 million investment dollar for dollar.

The Minister said ten of the homes would be delivered in the 2009-10 financial year and the additional homes in the next three financial years.

"The dwellings constructed will house families exiting homelessness services which are identified as able to sustain a tenancy in public housing after an initial period of supported accommodation," Ms Burch said.

"The accommodation will be provided first followed by the support so that these vulnerable families can begin the process of turning their lives around," she said.

Ms Burch said the Budget also provided \$750,000 for the refurbishment of the Uniting Church of Canberra's Pilgrim House in Civic.

The funding will allow for the expansion and upgrade of Pilgrim House's early morning drop-in centre on Northbourne Avenue to provide homeless people with food, showers, laundry and storage facilities, as well as access to a range of information, referral and support services.

"The expanded service will help address social marginalisation by offering recreational facilities and a place for people to meet and socialise in a non-threatening environment," Ms Burch said.

"The ACT Government is committed to supporting the most vulnerable members of our community.

"Secure long-term housing and services that provide the basic essentials, as well as access to targeted programs and support organisations, is key to reducing homelessness in our community."

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