



ACT
Government

22
23

Australian Capital Territory

Budget

Delivering for Canberrans:
now and into the future

**Social Inclusion
Budget Statement**

Introduction

The ACT Government is committed to ensuring Canberra remains the most welcoming and inclusive city in Australia. Through the 2022-23 Budget we are delivering measures that will help Canberrans from a range of backgrounds to support their inclusion and provide a strong basis for their ongoing wellbeing.

As we continue to adapt to living with COVID-19, the 2022-23 Budget focusses on the investment needed to deliver services for all Canberrans now and into the future. While the pandemic continues to impact our diverse community in different ways, there is much to be optimistic about - including the Territory's growing and increasingly diverse population, world-leading vaccination rates and pandemic response and our unique quality of life.

The 2022-23 Budget is focussed on ensuring we have health facilities that can manage the needs of our growing population while maintaining flexibility to respond to the pandemic as it evolves. We are also investing in our education system, jobs growth and justice system.

The ACT Government is increasing funding to a wide range of community organisations through this Budget. This ensures the continuation of services and programs that thousands of Canberrans, including many of our most vulnerable, rely upon and provides more certainty for community sector partners over the coming year.

This applies to roughly 100 community providers delivering more than 250 essential services for Canberrans, such as services for homelessness, child and family support, legal services, family safety, mental health, and alcohol and other drug dependencies.

Through this Budget we are delivering high quality services to invest in Canberra's people and places, aimed at increasing wellbeing across the Territory at the individual and community levels. The Government is also delivering a range of diversity and inclusion programs to ensure the ACT Public Service continues to be progressive, inclusive, and truly reflective of the community it serves.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

The 2022-23 Budget demonstrates the Government's dedication to improving policy, services and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, building on our commitments under the *ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028* and the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Budget Statement provides information on relevant Budget initiatives.

Children and young people

The 2022-23 Budget includes several important initiatives to support Canberra's children, young people, and their families.

The Government recognises that early childhood education and access to life-long learning are integral to the wellbeing of Canberra's children and young people. The Government is continuing to deliver 15 hours per week, or 600 hours per year, of free public preschool for four year olds.

Through the Preschool Reform Agreement with the Commonwealth, the ACT Government will be supporting all preschool settings to deliver high-quality education for children in the year before formal schooling. This Budget ensures continuation of the high-quality learning available through public preschools.

This Budget also provides funding to implement the *Education Amendment Bill 2022*, focused on ensuring children and young people have access to high-quality education and the protective factors that education provides. This includes establishment and monitoring of a new Student Movement Register for all schooling sectors, and implementation of new Registration Standards for non-government schools.

ACT public schools are also receiving additional support to make sure our schools remain safe for all. Building on the investments made in the 2021-22 Budget, the Government will establish a Safe@Schools taskforce to undertake a system-wide review to strengthen the safety culture within ACT public schools for teachers and students. The teaching workforce will also be supported with additional resourcing for training, communication, and project management.

A focus this year will be supporting children to be healthy and active as Canberra recovers from the impacts of COVID-19. Building on funding provided through the 2020-21 Budget, the Government is providing grants to support vulnerable or disadvantaged children to participate in recreational activities that improve their physical wellbeing, health and social skills. We are funding organisations including the Physical Activity Foundation, the Heart Foundation, Kulture Break, Abilities Unlimited Australia, Pegasus Riding for the Disabled and Every Chance to Play to help achieve this.

Children and young people will be able to enjoy new play spaces across the ACT. Over the last year work has progressed on new playgrounds in Taylor, Whitlam and Coombs. Construction of a destination play space in Watson provided for in this year's Budget will cater for a range of age groups with picnic tables, nature play equipment, static exercise equipment, synthetic soft-fall, two multi-use courts, a bike track and toilet facilities.

These playgrounds have many all-abilities elements incorporated into their design and the themes of the playgrounds respond to their official name. For example, Judy Harris Park in Coombs celebrates the Aboriginal culture of its namesake by incorporating her own artwork into the playground signage.

The implementation of the recently launched *Next Steps for our Kids 2022-2030: ACT Strategy to Strengthen Families and Keep Children and Young People Safe* ('Next Steps') will also be supported through the 2022-23 Budget. As well as providing ongoing funding for Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation and OzChild to continue to deliver the successful *Functional Family Therapy - Child Welfare* program, the Budget increases investment in services for children, young people and families involved in the child protection system and facilitates the transition to new service delivery arrangements, guided by *Next Steps*. Children and their families will benefit from increased investment in targeted, culturally safe, and therapeutic family support services and support for safe, stable living arrangements where this is required.

We are strengthening mental health support for families and young children. This Budget provides funding for enhanced responses for perinatal, infant and child mental health and wellbeing, including universal perinatal mental health screening, data collection, and establishing a behavioural therapy service for mothers and infants.

We are expanding mental health supports for youth and young adults to address priority needs of young people who are or are at risk of experiencing poor mental health, suicide or self-harm through a *Youth at Risk* program.

Multicultural communities

Canberra celebrates its cultural and linguistic diversity. We are building on the progress made towards finalising the *Multicultural Recognition Act* and multicultural charter, as well as progressing our city's recognition and accreditation as a Welcoming City to 'Advanced' Level within the international Welcoming Cities Standard.

The 2021 Census showed that more Canberrans than ever were born overseas. Since 2016 the percentage of ACT households where a language other than English is spoken has risen to more than 25 per cent.

Cultural identity, belonging and social connection are being supported with increased funding for the *Community Language Schools* program. We are boosting this program with new funds for professional development, resources for teachers, along with financial assistance for hire and room charges.

Through the Refugee, Asylum Seeker and Humanitarian Discretionary Fund, we are providing additional funding in support of ACT Services Access Card holders facing increasing housing and essential living costs.

After a hiatus due to the pandemic, the Canberra community will be excited to welcome back the National Multicultural Festival in 2023, the 25-year anniversary of the event. Additional funding in this year's Budget will enable the festival to be COVID-safe, inclusive and accessible.

LGBTIQ+

In 2022, the Government launched the *Capital of Equality Strategy Second Action Plan*. The Second Action Plan reflects the Government's commitment to ensuring Canberra continues to be the most LGBTIQ+ welcoming and inclusive city in Australia.

This Budget enhances actions under the *Capital of Equality Strategy* to improve the wellbeing and circumstances of LGBTIQ+ Canberrans, their families and communities, including:

- > increased grants funding for grassroots LGBTIQ+ programs;
- > ongoing funding for Meridian to provide specialist LGBTIQ+ awareness training, operate the Canberra Pride Hub, and support Fair Day;
- > a feasibility study on the concept of an LGBTIQ+ information hub; and
- > supporting programs within the ACT Public Service specialising in LGBTIQ+ workplace diversity, HR and organisational change.

The Government is also investing in new systems and additional care to improve support and decision-making in the health care of people with variations in sex characteristics and their families, including psychosocial care, peer led supports, training and education and regulatory functions.

Women

The 2022-23 Budget includes several investments for women, including significant resources to prevent and respond to domestic, family and sexual violence. This includes a suite of measures to implement a foundational set of recommendations from the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program Steering Committee's *Listen. Take Action to Prevent, Believe and Heal* report.

This work is a necessary step forward to improving system responses and coordination for victim survivors. Implementation activities will be guided by close consultation with victim survivors of sexual assault and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

The *Addressing Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence* factsheet provides more information about the range of initiatives aimed towards the prevention of violence against women and their children.

The Women's Budget Statement provides further information on initiatives being funded in the 2022-23 Budget to improve the wellbeing of women and girls in the ACT.

Older Canberrans

We remain committed to ensuring that Canberra is an age-friendly city through the ongoing implementation of the *Age-Friendly City Plan*.

The Government has heard from the community about the need to improve access to hydrotherapy services, important for many older Canberrans on Canberra's southside. To address this need, we are funding a detailed design process and construction of a southside hydrotherapy pool at the Tuggeranong Lakeside Leisure Centre.

This Budget makes investments to reduce elective surgery wait times, delivering 60,000 more elective surgeries over four years to 2024-25. We are also continuing and expanding the *Good Life with Arthritis* program, a preventive program that delays or reduces the number of people needing lower joint replacement surgery.

The Government is continuing to fund weekday flexible public transport services to meet the accessible transport needs of Canberrans aged 70 years and older, and for people on a disability support pension.

Access to the Fitness to Drive Medical Clinic is also continuing in 2022-23. The Fitness to Drive Medical Clinic provides ACT driver licence holders with a fair, equitable and rigorous assessment of fitness to drive against the Austroads medical standards.

Disability

Work is continuing to develop the *ACT Disability Strategy* to create a more welcoming and accessible community and improve the lives of the more than 80,000 Canberrans with disability.

Extensive community consultation was undertaken between March and July 2022. This process was co-designed and led by the ACT Disability Reference Group and heard the thoughts, experiences and ideas of people with disability, carers, allies, employers, business owners, service providers, community groups and interested community members. A 'Listening Report', to be released around the International Day of People with Disability, will reflect back to the community what was heard during the consultation. The *ACT Disability Strategy* and First Action Plan will be launched in 2023 and outline how the Territory will work toward becoming a more inclusive community over the next 10 years.

Our ongoing progress towards full social inclusion for people with disability is reflected in the development of a Second Action Plan for the *Disability Justice Strategy 2019–2029*. The Strategy aims to achieve equity and inclusion for people with disability in the justice system. We are mobilising existing resources to develop the Second Action Plan building on the foundations of the First Action Plan, which will come to an end in 2023. A recent Progress Report highlights the Strategy's valuable contributions toward ensuring people with disability have equal access to justice in the ACT.

The Budget is funding the continued development of an *ACT Disability Health Strategy* and First Action Plan, co-designed with the ACT disability community, to improve health outcomes for people with disability, their families, and carers.

Carers

In this Budget, we are progressing the next phase of work under the *ACT Carers Strategy 2018-2028*, improving community awareness of the value and contribution of carers. This initiative includes funding for community-based policy and implementation resources, the Carers Strategy governance group, developing a Carer Respite Options Handbook, and an annual event recognising carers.

The ACT community services sector plays a critical role in delivering programs and services that improve health and social outcomes for Canberrans, particularly people who are vulnerable or at risk. In light of that, the ACT Government is funding the development of a Social Recovery Framework to better understand priorities for individuals, the community sector and the broader community for social recovery following a disaster like the pandemic.

Veterans

It is estimated 22,000 veterans live in the ACT. We also recognise the important role of families in providing support for veterans.

The ACT Government supports veterans and their families' wellbeing and social inclusion through the *Veterans' Grants Program*. In 2022-23 grants will continue to respond to the needs of the veteran community, with initiatives focusing on ageing veterans, contemporary veterans and veterans' families all eligible for grants.

The ACT Government has also welcomed the opportunity to engage with the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide and is taking an active role in this important process. We are also continuing to participate in ongoing work being undertaken by the interim National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran suicide prevention, Dr Bernadette Boss.

The ACT Government is committed to supporting the ACT's veteran community, through a variety of programs, initiatives and participation in commemorations. The Veterans' Employment Strategy is the ACT Government's vision to make the ACT Public Service (ACTPS) a leader in the recruitment and retention of veterans. The Strategy outlines the ACT Government's priorities for ensuring veterans and their families choose to remain in, or move to, Canberra as they transition to civilian life. The ACTPS was proud to be awarded gold pledge partner status and take the Soldier On pledge in May 2022. In addition, the ACT Government continues to support veterans' wellbeing through a range of initiatives including ACTPS Executive Veterans Employment Champions.