Secretariat
Select Committee on Estimates 2024-2025

Via email: LACommitteeEstimates@parliament.act.gov.au

Dear Committee Members,

AFI welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry as well as the Committees decision to continue to hold the Community Day hearings.

These hearings provide an important avenue for the community to inform the estimates process. They are relevant and appropriate to support accountability and transparency for important investments, especially in a sector that is generally resource poor.

**About us**

Advocacy for Inclusion (AFI) is an independent organisation delivering systemic advocacy informed by our experience in individual advocacy and community and government consultation. We provide dedicated individual and self-advocacy services, training, information and resources in the ACT.

As a Disabled People’s Organisation, the majority of our organisation, including our Board of Management, staff and members are people with disabilities. AFI speaks with the authority of lived experience. We are strongly committed to advancing opportunities for the insights, experiences, and opinions of people with disabilities to be heard and acknowledged.

AFI operates under a human rights framework. We uphold the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and strive to promote and advance human rights and inclusion of people with disabilities in the community. AFI is a declared public authority under the Human Rights Act 2004.

**Budget overview**

This submission provides an overview of our commentary on the Budget. For a detailed analysis, we would direct to the detailed portfolio extract at Attachment A (below) which includes highlights for people with disability, low-income, and vulnerable Canberrans.

We were part of a shared Budget submission with ACT Down Syndrome and Intellectual Disability, Women with Disabilities ACT, and which was endorsed by Mental Health Community Coalition ACT. This submission should be read in conjunction with that shared submission which can be [found here](https://www.advocacyforinclusion.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Budget-policy-asks-final-24-25-Joint-sub.pdf).

Overall, we welcomed this Budget. While not all our priorities were met, and there are some investment areas which require more attention or detail, we feel overall that this budget landed some important and timely investment. We congratulate the ACT Government, Minister Stephen-Smith and others in the Assembly who continue to keep a watchful focus on provisioning for the needs of people with disability.

While our initial analysis raised concerns about the need for investment in the promised system of Foundational Supports for people with disability recommended by the NDIS Review, we were pleased to receive advice shortly after the Budget that the Government had delivered a contingency of $90 million to support this new system which we understand will be matched by the Commonwealth. We would welcome more detail about how the figure was arrived at and the unmet need assumptions behind. Beyond that an investment of this size is welcome and significant. There is urgency to the work on Foundational Supports given the fraying state of some local services and the Federal Governments moves to limit NDIS access and supports.

We welcome the investment in a Disability Reform Taskforce which will be focused on funding officials to do the design work. However, we note that the sector also needs funding to engage in a highly ambitious redesign of disability supports. The ACT has experienced an unprecedented increase in demand for disability advocacy services. These include complex governmental reforms, program and service changes, as well as sharp demand and need to respond to policy shifts instigated by recent national reports as the Disability Royal Commission and NDIS Review. It is essential that Disabled Person’s Organisations (DPOs) are appropriately resourced to engage with these agenda. Without this support and investment, DPOs will not be able to function at their best and ACT service and program changes will suffer from a lack of disability representation.

We also continue to seek funding for consolidated and integrated case management services for people with disability in the ACT, covering CYPS, housing, justice and post-acute health care. We hope this might be a focus of the foundational supports but it’s not clear that they will.

We warmly welcome funding for the Disability Strategies – the ACT Disability Strategy which received $3.552 million in the Budget and the Health Strategy which received $4.039m in the MYEFO. However, the path to funding for some of the other Strategy work is unclear including the ACT Inclusive Education Strategy which received a relatively small investment of $662,000 in the MYEFO and the ACT Neurodiversity Strategy which is being wrapped into the ACT Disability Strategy. Although there is a detailed breakdown of money for violence and sexual assault services from the Safer Families Levy, we could not locate money to develop the ACT Domestic Family and Sexual Violence Strategy given it is marked for development in this financial year.

Going forward we are keen that the money for the Disability Health Strategy in particular finds its way to measures which improve patient experience.

We also welcomed funding towards establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisation disability service. We hope that this grows from the local community and also draws on the expertise of the First Peoples Disability Network FPDN.

Housing maintenance and repairs are overdue investments given the number of people with disability in poorly maintained public housing which has become inaccessible. We also supported a small measure to provide stamp duty offsets for homes. We would however have liked to see more money to increase the supply of affordable private rental housing.

We welcome a range of measures in ACT Health and Canberra Health Services especially the new multidisciplinary rehabilitation and disability support services and the investments in paediatric services to allow children to access care closer to home. We also welcome additional funding for the University of Canberra Hospital. Expansion and infrastructure work to improve access at Canberra Hospitals campus is highly welcome. We would have liked to have seen some dedicated funding to respond to unintended consequences from Voluntary Assisted Dying, such as additional supports and suicide prevention work. We hope that the training being rolled out under VAD includes training on the social model of disability.

A focus on cost of living in this Budget is welcome as too many people with disability face high costs of living with low incomes while grappling with the costs of disability such as additional expenses in heating and cooling. The Taxi Subsidy Scheme increases are welcome although we would like to see more relief directed towards passengers rather than drivers.

We welcome a focus on equitable enrolment, but we would have liked to see more specific money to deliver the Inclusive Education Strategy. We hope that investments are targeted towards improving access and resourcing needed by students in mainstream schools. We would like to see more focus and resourcing for universal design in school infrastructure and curricula as well as additional supports to relieve teacher workloads.

We would be keen to know whether the Budget investments in improvements to building certification, planning, heritage arrangements and in housing access, choice and accountability will include a focus on accessibility and universal design as recommended in our ongoing advocacy in many submissions such the [Age-Friendly City Plan 2025-35](https://www.advocacyforinclusion.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Age-Friendly-City-Plan-Submission-FINAL.docx), the [Inquiry into ACT Heritage Arrangements](https://www.advocacyforinclusion.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Inquiry-into-ACT-heritage-arrangements-AFI-Submission-1-1.docx), our submission on the [Planning Bill 2022](https://www.advocacyforinclusion.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Assembly-inquiry-into-planning-November-22-FINAL.pdf), the [Pathway to Electrification in the ACT](https://www.advocacyforinclusion.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/AFI-Submission-ACT-Pathway-to-Electrification.docx), the [Inquiry into Cost of Living Pressures in the ACT](https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/2199922/019.-Advocacy-for-Inclusion.pdf), our submission on the [Planning Bill 2022](https://www.advocacyforinclusion.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Assembly-inquiry-into-planning-November-22-FINAL.pdf), well as the ACT Planning System Review and Reform Project.

The investments in justice are welcome. We continue to advocate for other reforms including work to minimise the presence of people with disability in the justice system and support people to maximise financial independence and a review of fees and charges applied by public trustees.

We welcome a focus on community facilities upgrades and will be watching closely to ensure that these prioritise and adequately fund accessibility.

We would like to see policy work and investments which address transport equity and disadvantage including beyond point-to-point transport. We need to see all buses accessible, a more functional and diverse wheelchair taxi fleet, regulation of rideshare and micromobility devices, improvements to transport hubs and our streets alongside transport policy and planning work which addresses rapidly changing modes of transports alongside rapid urban development.

We are looking forward to expanding on this submission at the Inquiry. This submission is endorsed by Mental Health Community Coalition ACT.

Please feel free to discuss this submission with AFI via Craig Wallace, Head of Policy on 0477 200 755. We look forward to appearing at the Budget Estimates Community Day Hearing on 22 July.

Regards

(sent by email)

Nicolas Lawler

Chief Executive

16 July 2024

Attachment A

**ACT Government 2024-25 Budget – summary of key measures effecting people with disability and/or vulnerable Canberrans plus detailed commentary**

**Part A: Directorate analysis**

As part of our analysis we flag a range of measures we identified as having implications for people with disability, low income and vulnerable Canberrans - inclusion in this list does not mean we necessarily endorse the measures.

ACT Health and Canberra Health Services

* $52,81,000 over 4 years for new multi-disciplinary health centres in North Gungahlin and the Inner South and to undertake design work for the health centre in West Belconnen
* $520,000 over 1 year better care for our community – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health initiatives
* $1.910 million over four years for enhanced support to people facing mental health distress and a community based crisis response 0 over 4 years offset by previous budget
* $650,000 over 2 years for Housing for Vulnerable People funded offset by previous budget
* $341,000 in 2024-25 for continuing the expanded Detention Exit Community Outreach Program
* The Budget includes ongoing delivery of youth mental health services as an offset measure
* $4,209,000 over 4 years for ongoing support for the second PACER team
* $7,444,000 over 2 years for the administration of Voluntary Assisted Dying (but this does not include the measures sought by AFI including a support fund and suicide prevention work)
* $18,300 000 over 4 years for works for the new Northside Hospital and enhancing health infrastructure at North Canberra Hospital
* $1,577, 000 over 4 years for planning the next stages of the Canberra Hospital Expansion (accessible entrance)
* $966,000 over 4 years to Upgrading and enhancing health infrastructure at Canberra Hospital
* $24,886, 000 over 4 years Expanding paediatric services at Canberra Hospital and in the community -supporting multidisciplinary rehabilitation and disability support services for children with chronic and complex conditions to access care closer to home; and establishment of a community-based service in Molonglo for children at risk of delayed development and chronic health conditions.
* $8,832,000 over 4 years to support the safety of cognitively impaired patients and staff
* $12,858,000 over 1 year supporting inpatient rehabilitation at University of Canberra Hospital
* $586,000 over 4 years to continue the Children and Young people Equipment Loan scheme

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

* $10,600,000 over 4 years for the Affordable Housing Project Fund 2024-25
* Improving the energy efficiency of Canberra’s public housing  – the cost of the initiative is offset
* $516,000 over 1 year for Support for Vulnerable Canberrans
* $257,000 over 1 year for Energy Bill Relief
* $5,784,000 over 4 years to expand concessions and the Taxi Subsidy Scheme
* This includes an increase in the lift fee from $15.20 to $25 per trip while the maximum TSS subsidy cap per taxi trip will increase by 3.25 per cent in 2024-25 and be indexed annually in line with legislated taxi fare increases.
* $2,640,000 over 1 year for Targeted Electricity, Gas and Water Rebate

Community Services Directorate

* $90 million over five years from 2025-26 for the establishment of foundational supports for all people with disability, including those who do not have access to the NDIS. The Govt says this ‘reflects National Cabinet’s agreement in December 2023 to joint funding for foundational supports, which would see the ACT Government’s investment at least matched by the Commonwealth. Examples of foundational supports include navigation support, information, advice and capacity building for individuals, families and communities, and low intensity support needs, as well as peer support, self-advocacy and disability employment supports. The ACT Government will continue to work closely with the community sector in the development of foundational supports’
* $300,000 over four years to build capacity and capability of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations
* $586,000 over 4 years for the continuation of the Children and Young People Equipment Loan Scheme (CAYPELS)
* $913,000 over four years for emergency material, financial aid and food relief
* $3,552,000 for the ACT Disability Strategy over 4 years (ramping up to over $1m p.a in years 3 and 4)
* The Budget contains an item establishing a Disability Reform Taskforce to respond to the NDIS review and DRC
* $1.755m over four years to establish an External Merits Review mechanism of Child Protection Decisions
* $380,000 (all in year one) funding to Victim Support ACT and the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre to improve support for victim-survivors of sexual assault plus $2,593,000 for supporting frontline responses to sexual violence
* $7,415,000 over four years for Safer Families – Investing in frontline domestic and family violence services
* The $7,989 million Next Steps for Our Kids strategy includes support for parents and families with disability – work to support parents with a disability is welcome
* $375,000 all in year one for a Coercive Control Response Package
* $233,000 to train health staff responding to family violence
* There is a measure continuing the Growth and Renewal of Public Housing and Social Housing Accelerator (funding is not outlined)
* There is a measure Establishing a Public Housing repairs and maintenance insourcing taskforce – funded as offset
* $51,163,000 for Public Housing Repairs and Maintenance
* $2,487,000 over four years of more funding for Homelessness Services and Program

Education Directorate

* $2,821,000 over four years to funding equitable enrolment to support more students with additional needs in ACT public schools. Support will be targeted at students with disability, students with lower socio-economic status, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. This initiative builds on the Government’s commitment to support students with disability and complex health needs in ACT public schools.
* Future of Education Equity Fund – Cost of Living Relief $1000,000 over 1 year
* Investing in public education – Continuation of Meals in Schools 1,871, 000 over 1 year

Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate

* $1,508,000 over four years to strengthen bushfire safety risk reduction and response capabilities
* $200,000 (all in year one) for a food strategy
* $1,001,000 over four years to reform the Heritage System –
* $202,000 over four years to improve the Building Certification system
* $2,312,000 over four years to improving Visitor Experience at Tidbinbilla and Canberra Nature Parks
* There are two housing measures listed as zero funds/offsets in EPSD re housing to increase housing access, choice and affordability.
* $2,000,000 listed as an offset for the Integrated Energy Plan – Vulnerable Household Electrification Programs which will provide energy efficiency and electrification upgrades for up to 350 eligible households

Justice and Community Safety Directorate

* $317, 000 over 2 years for the Disability Justice Strategy for DLO’s Disability Liaison Officers within the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, Aboriginal Legal Services and Victim Support ACT
* $2,714,000 over two years for CLCs
* $791,000 over 4 years to support expanded HRC functions
* $274,000 over (1?) year for continuation and expansion of the Justice Housing Program
* $3,617,000 over 3 years for Reducing over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the ACT Criminal Justice System
* $815,000 over 1 year for Rent Relief Fund Extension
* $682,000 in 2024-25 to support the operation of the Care and Protection Intensive List within the ACT Children’s Court.
* $200,000 in 2024-25 for developing a monitoring and evaluation framework to measure program success in reducing recidivism.
* $686,000 over four years for additional resources to address the current waitlist for restorative justice services and improve legislative record-keeping and reporting requirements.

Major Projects Canberra

* $6,206,000 for cladding in private buildings
* $1,590,00 for a new community centre for Woden
* There is a measure for community facility improvements (funding is unclear)

Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate

* The Budget includes a Fare free period to support MyWay+ transition
* There is funding of $1,438 million this year to continue weekday flexible public transport services to support accessible transport needs and ensure services are maintained while the Government completes a trial for a new online booking and management system to deliver an improved, on-demand service model

**Part B: Specific measures for people with disability**

Below are specific measures we identified as beneficial.

* $90 million over five years from 2025-26 for the establishment of foundational supports for all people with disability, including those who do not have access to the NDIS (to be matched by Commonwealth).
* $3,552,000 for the ACT Disability Strategy over 4 years (ramping up to over $1m p.a in years 3 and 4)
* $24,886,000 package of paediatric services including supporting multidisciplinary rehabilitation and disability support services for children with chronic and complex conditions to access care closer to home
* $2,821,000 over four years to funding on equitable enrolment – we look forward to more detail and hope this will result in more enrolments in mainstream schools
* $2.767 million over four years to improve mental health outcomes for people with high-intensity mental health support needs, including community-based programs​
* The Budget contains an item establishing a Disability Reform task force to respond to the NDIS review, but we have questions about how this is funded and arranged
* $317,000 over 2 years for the Disability Justice Strategy to continue the Disability Liaison Officers within the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, Aboriginal Legal Services and Victim Support ACT
* The Next Steps for Our Kids strategy includes support for parents and families with disability – work to support parents with a disability is welcome
* Additional subsidies under the ACT Taxi Subsidy Scheme (lift fee, a small increase in the subsidy cap and indexation)
* An expansion of the Severe Disability Duty Exemption, relating to home ownership, to commence from 1 July 2025

**Part C: Measures we have questions or concerns about**

Below are some notes on areas where we require more detail or clarity

* While we welcome a focus on equitable enrolment we remain unclear what the education enrolment work will actually deliver or how it will link to the delivery of the ACT inclusive education strategy
* What will the disability elements of the Next Steps for Our Kids investment be?
* How much of the Disability Health Strategy will be spent in community vs in house? Why is the Disability Health Strategy not in the Outlook?
* We have queries about the Disability Reform Taskforce will operate, be scaled and be whole of Government. What is the contribution of the Federal Government given this is being driven by shared intergovernmental reform priorities?
* To what extent will the Housing affordability and access measures will improve universal design?
* We’re unclear about the extent to which measures in ESPDD around planning, housing, heritage or access to Tidbinbilla will prioritise disability access
* While we welcome the community facilities measure we’d be keen to know why the Outlook lists it as cost neutral
* We would appreciate more information on the severe disability duty exemption for Housing including who is eligible and how this is targeted
* We’d be keen to know how the ACT Neurodiversity Strategy will be scaled and funded within the ACT Disability Strategy
* What does the flexible inclusive transport funding cover and why is it only for one year?
* While we welcome the increases to the TSS we would have preferred more of the increase to go towards subsidising the costs borne by passengers rather than a further large increase in the lift fee

**Part D: Areas of missing investment or detail**

Below are some notes which points to areas which appear to insufficient or missing

* Although there is money for equitable enrolment, we could not locate dedicated money for the delivery of the Inclusive Education Strategy First Action Plan.  We sought in student loadings, teacher workload issues and extensive infrastructure investments to improve our poor record of inclusion in mainstream schools.
* We continue to seek money for consolidated and integrated case management services for people with disability in the ACT, covering CYPS, housing, justice and post-acute health care.
* Although there is a detailed breakdown of money for violence and sexual assault services from the Safer Families Levy, we could not locate money to develop the ACT Domestic Family and Sexual Violence Strategy given it is marked for development in this financial year
* While there is money for social and affordable housing, we were disappointed there is limited money directly targeted for gold standard accessible housing.
* An ambitious focus on increasing non-government universal housing supply.
* There is no money for the additional supports and suicide prevention work the disability community sought around the introduction of Voluntary Assisted Dying.