**ACT Budget 2023-24 Analysis – Advocacy for Inclusion**

# Key messaging – at a glance

* The Government has a busy reform agenda for disability, and we welcome the fact they have said they *intend* to implement and fund the ACT Disability Strategy, the Disability Health Strategy and the Inclusive Education Strategy, plus continue the Justice Strategy.
* However, these are major whole of government strategies requiring multi-year investment and we expected to start seeing some dollars attached to them in the 2023 Budget.
* Specifically, Canberrans with disability have invested time and expertise working with Government to working to build a disability health strategy.
* We know that major investment is needed and that should be starting now, especially as fiscal pressures ease while the impact of COVID continues.
* People with disability have told Government they need a strategy to deliver dedicated funding to improve diagnostic services, accessible equipment, information and infrastructure and cultural change towards people with disability
* Outside of the Strategies, AFI does welcome investments to address cost of living, expand accessible infrastructure, improve housing maintenance and public housing supply, to limit gambling harm and continue the Disability Justice Strategy (especially the liaison officers), to address family violence and a boost to the ACT Taxi Subsidy Scheme as well as support with costs of utilities.
* We also welcome a focus on inclusive education and will be seeking more details on some measures in the coming days

# Welcome measures:

*Overarching non-specific commitment to fund strategies:*

No specific dedicated money for the ACT Disability Strategy or the Health Strategy

However, the Budget outlook at page 71 indicates that “Government has committed to a *funded and comprehensive* ACT Disability Strategy, Disability Justice Strategy, Disability Health Strategy, Inclusive Education Strategy and working with the Commonwealth Government on the review of the National Disability Insurance Scheme. *Details of specific initiatives will be announced once the strategies are finalised.* Significant work has already been completed and funded in this Budget for disability strategy actions in the Education and Justice sectors, with support for an initial roll-out of inclusion coaches in our schools, and extended funding for disability liaison officers in the justice sector”.

# Portfolio analysis – measures which benefit people with disability

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development

**Better community infrastructure** – Public building upgrades a range of upgrades and rectification works across the Government’s community and government building portfolio. This initiative ensures ongoing functionality and safety, including accessibility - $4.13m over 4 years

**Mental health training in the workforce** - Work Health and Safety Liaison grant program delivered through Unions ACT to support education and awareness, including around psychosocial hazards. $677,000 funded as an offset

**Vulnerable household energy support** - The Government will continue the Vulnerable Household Energy Support Scheme (the Scheme) to provide support for community housing providers, eligible private rental providers, and low-income homeowners to install energy efficient insulation and replace gas appliances with electrical alternatives. This includes heating and cooling appliances, hot water heat pumps, and stove tops. The Scheme will also support insulation and electrification upgrades in public housing properties.

**Free Wi-Fi** – The Budget includes funding to retain free Wi-Fi in Canberra centre - $432,000 over 4 years

**Funding for community sector indexation** – the Budget includes funding for community sector wage indexation - $14.981m over 4 years

The Government will provide additional support to low-income households facing escalating living costs. Including:

**Increases to the Taxi Subsidy Scheme payment cap** by 15 per cent from 1 July 2023. Scheme members will also now be automatically entitled to up to 854 trips per year, increased from 126 trips previously (this is very welcome and AFI have previously called for this)

**One-off payments for utilities**. - 37,780,000 over 4 years.

The Government will continue to meet the **increased demand for the medical management of driver’s licenses** including funding for the Fitness to Drive Medical Clinic within Canberra 2023-24 Budget Outlook 114 Investing in the Wellbeing of Canberrans Health Services. This includes the expansion of commercial health assessments to all Medium Rigid licence class holders and above. – 550,000 over 4 years (only funded for 2, the other years depreciation)

**Increasing housing access, choice and affordability** – Build-to-Rent and Affordable Housing Project Fund. A $60 million Affordable Housing Project Fund to expand the social and affordable housing stock in the ACT. Up to 22 affordable properties for at-risk and vulnerable women under the Ginninderry Build-to-Rent-to-Buy initiative; and around 160 community housing owned or managed affordable rental properties for a minimum of 15 years across three Build-to-Rent developments under the 2022-23 RFP process.

**Better community infrastructure** – Renewing Canberra's city precinct. public realm and streetscape upgrades across the City Precinct and at Dickson shops to improve access and walkability. - 7,200,000

Community Services Directorate

**CDS and CAYPELS**- The Government will redesign the Child Development Service (CDS) and the Children and Young Person Equipment Loan Scheme (CAYPELS) to create an integrated and collaborative service model within the Early Childhood Early Intervention system of care. This includes funding to expand the Autism Spectrum Disorder assessment service. $2.6m mainly funded in the first two years

**External merits review for child protection** - The Budget includes a measure to implement to Community support and inclusion – Implementing the external merits review process for child protection decisions (funded as offset)

**New services to support raising the Age of Criminal Responsibility**: The Budget includes new service responses to raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility. This will include funding for an ongoing Functional Family Therapy Youth Justice program, establishment of a Therapeutic Support Panel and intensive case management and support services including accommodation. Funding is $10.4 million over 4 years

**Further investment into frontline domestic, family and sexual violence services -** The Government will continue to invest in frontline domestic, family and sexual violence services in the ACT that provide critical supports in responding to cases of domestic and family violence. This funding will also provide additional support for the Safer Families Assistance Program and a review of domestic and family violence initiatives to inform service gaps and the ongoing response to victim-survivor needs. This initiative will be partially funded by the Safer Families Levy and continues the support for frontline domestic violence and rape crisis services. This initiative will be partially offset by Commonwealth Government funding provided through the Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence National Partnership Multilateral Agreement. $6,740,000.00 over four years.

Justice and Community Safety

**Reducing reliance on EGM’s** - The Government will continue measures aimed at reducing gambling harm caused by ACT electronic gaming machines (EGMs). The Government will also target a reduction of EGMs to 3,500 by 1 July 2025 through a continuation of its EGM buyback initiatives, including forgoing fees and charges associated with surrenders. $8.8m

**Disability Liaison Officers** - The Government will support implementation of the Disability Justice Strategy by ensuring Disability Liaison Officers are available to assist people with disability who are victims of crime, including family violence. This initiative is partially offset by funds from the Confiscated Assets Trust Fund. $266,000 funded through offsets

Once finalised, the Disability Justice Strategy will be released later in 2023 with further actions and initiatives.

**Youth Detention Oversight -** The Government will provide additional funding to the Office of the Inspector of Correctional Services to oversee the Bimberi Youth Justice Centre and reinforce the ACT's 2023-24 Budget Outlook 176 Investing in the Wellbeing of Canberrans National Preventive Mechanism, a state obligation under the international Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture. $706,000.

**Human Rights -** The Government will provide additional resourcing to the Human Rights Commission (HRC) to meet a growing demand for its services. This includes additional funding for the Public Advocate to improve outcomes for vulnerable Canberrans, including children and young people. It will also strengthen the capacity of the Discrimination, Heath Services, Disability and Community Services Commissioner to better support Canberrans accessing the HRC’s complaints process.

Health (ACT Health Directorate and Canberra Health Services)

**Continuation of the second Police, Ambulance and Clinician Early Response (PACER) team**, which provides an integrated model of care bringing together police, paramedics, and mental health clinicians - $1.3 million in 2023-24

**Establishment of a centre of excellence of older Canberrans** – cost offset by health funding envelope

**Improving palliative care** – the Government will build a new 12 care specialist palliative care ward at Canberra Hospital. Funding covers design and construction. $15,466,000.000 over four years.

**Funding for the detailed design of the new Northside Hospital,** and provisioning construction over six years. $64.2 million over four years.

**Community Health Care -** The Government will design and construct a new community-based health services in South-Tuggeranong and conduct site planning and preliminary design for additional community-based health services in North Gungahlin and the Inner South. These centres will focus on preventative care and advice, early intervention and the management of acute and chronic illness. $255,000.00 over four years.

**Expanding and upgrading endoscopy services -** The Government will expand and upgrade the endoscopy services at Canberra Hospital delivering greater capacity and a better experience for public patients. $298,000.00 over four years.

**Community based mental health accommodation and early intervention services -** The Government will expand and upgrade the endoscopy services at Canberra Hospital delivering greater capacity and a better experience for public patients. The cost of this is offset by the health funding envelope.

**Improving support for mental health emergency department presentations -** The Government will provide funding for a feasibility study and early design of a safe assessment area in the North Canberra Hospital Emergency Department for mental health patients presenting with high-risk behaviours. $250,000.00 over the next year.

**Managing the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 and other emerging health threats -** The Government will continue funding the ACT’s ongoing response to COVID-19, supporting resilience and capability to respond to current and emerging public health threats. The Government will also continue the Post-COVID Recovery Clinic at the University of Canberra and the COVID Care at Home service by Canberra Health Services in 2023-24. $5,437,000.00 over two years.

**Research into the health impacts associated with climate change -** The Government will provide funding for research on the health impacts of climate change, and the development of a comprehensive climate change adaptation and resilience action plan for the ACT health sector. The cost of this program is offset by the health funding envelope.

Education

**CIT Upgrades -** Building and equipment upgrades across CIT campuses to improve disability access and ensure facilities are compliant with Work Health and Safety requirements. $1.7 million in 2023-24.

**Universal Access to Preschool for Three-Year-Olds -** The Government will ensure that all three-year-olds in the ACT will be able to access one day per week of free quality early childhood education from January 2024. The Government will also invest in early childhood education workforce initiatives to support, attract and retain our quality early childhood workforce, and ensure an adequate supply of high-quality early childhood education and care in the ACT. $28,885,000.00 over four years

Environment Planning and Sustainable Development

**Gungahlin community centre design and construction -** The Government will deliver a new community centre in Gungahlin which will provide facilities for a range of integrated community services, including a youth drop-in centre, and a dedicated community activity space. Funding includes rental costs to re-establish a youth drop-in centre at an interim location in Gungahlin until the new community centre is completed. $2,325,000.00 over four years.

Housing and Homelessness

**Money to maintain public housing -** The Government will provide additional funding to Housing ACT to grow, renew and maintain high quality public housing - $177m (4 years)

**Growing public housing** - The Government will provide additional funding to the Growing and Renewing Public Housing program to deliver 140 public housing dwellings - $55m

**Affordable Housing Project Fund** – New fund to help deliver government commitments under the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement and the National Housing Accord, and to support the growth of the community housing sector in the ACT - $60m

***Social Housing Accelerator* payment** – Commonwealth payment to the ACT Government to support a permanent boost in the ACT’s social and/or public housing stock - $50m

**Additional support for land release** - $11m

**Homelessness Services funding package** - $20m (1-4 years, depending on component)

**Initiatives we are unclear on / have concerns about:**

Education

**Inclusive Education –** Inclusive education strengthened in the ACT public schools through the phased implementation of Inclusion Coaches. Starting in Tuggeranong public schools network. The Government will also support transitions for students with disability and to develop workforce capability. This initiative builds on the Government’s commitment to review disability funding and support in Education, including providing funding during the 2021-22 Budget initiative Investing in public education – Disability Education Review. $7,474,000.00 over four years.

Issues: Unclear why coaching model identified and how targeted (i.e, starting in Tuggeranong). Sectors asks were for investments in universal design work and an increase in the student loading

**Infrastructure Upgrades Across Canberra Schools** - $21.9 million over four years for infrastructure upgrades across Canberra schools, including roofing works at four schools, and supporting infrastructure upgrades at Black Mountain School and Cranleigh Specialist Schools. $650,000 over four years.

Issues: AFI supports infrastructure work to keep children safe, but we question decisions which prioritise general infrastructure upgrades in specialist schools rather than accessible infrastructure in mainstream schools

**Relocatable Learning Units Across Public Schools** - The Government will continue to increase school capacity through the re-use of six existing Relocatable Learning Units (RLUs) across ACT public schools to meet projected enrolment growth and classroom needs. $399,000 over four years.

Issues: We question investments in RLU’s rather than better accessible fixed infrastructure