



ACT Budget: Some Gains, But Do They Balance Savings?

Analysis of the ACT Budget 2013 / 14

Part 1 of 2

Overview and Media Releases

June 2013

www.youthcoalition.net

The Youth Coalition of the ACT acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the traditional owners and continuing custodians of the lands of the ACT and we pay our respects to the Elders, families and ancestors.

We acknowledge that the effect of forced removal of Indigenous children from their families as well as past racist policies and actions continues today.

We acknowledge that the Indigenous people hold distinctive rights as the original people of modern day Australia including the right to a distinct status and culture, self-determination and land. The Youth Coalition of the ACT celebrates Ngunnawal culture and the invaluable contribution it makes to our community.

The Youth Coalition of the ACT (Youth Coalition) is the peak youth affairs body in the Australian Capital Territory and is responsible for representing the interests of people aged between 12 and 25 years of age and those who work with them. The Youth Coalition works to actively promote the well being and aspirations of young people in the ACT with particular respect to their political, cultural, economic and social development. The Youth Coalition is represented on many ACT advisory structures and provides advice to the ACT Government on a range of issues related to young people and youth services. For more information phone the Youth Coalition on (02) 6247 3540 or email info@youthcoalition.net

© Youth Coalition of the ACT
June 2013

Prepared by Youth Coalition staff: Emma Robertson, Taryn Morrison, William Mudford, Kate Webb, Jacob Wray and Natalie Oliver.

Thank you to the Youth Coalition staff team for their support. The Youth Coalition would also like to acknowledge the ongoing support and input of the ACT Peaks network, in particular our partnership work with Families ACT, Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT, Mental Health Community Coalition ACT, and the ACT Council of Social Services.

Director: Emma Robertson
Deputy Director: Natalie Oliver

Youth Coalition of the ACT
PO Box 5232, Lyneham, ACT, 2602
Phone (02) 6247 3540
info@youthcoalition.net
www.youthcoalition.net

Budget Analysis Overview

The Youth Coalition of the ACT, the peak body for youth affairs, acknowledges the challenges faced by the ACT Government in developing the ACT Budget 2013 / 14, and welcomes the announcement of funding for some key initiatives.

While the promising spending initiatives are welcomed, much of the detail is still to come. It is essential the ACT Government develop services in an informed way, utilising the evidence about what is needed and what works in providing key supports to young members of our community. The Youth Coalition calls on the ACT Government to include the views of young people and frontline community service workers in identifying the best ways in which these resources can be utilised moving forward.

The ACT Budget 2013 / 14 contains a number of promising gains for young people, in particular that the ACT Government's election commitment to additional funding for youth engagement services has been realised. The Budget also recognises the ACT sign on to the National Plan for School Improvement (Gonski reforms), increases funding for community based mental health services, and invests in the establishment of a Trauma Recovery and Research Centre.

The Youth Coalition highlights concern however that the new initiatives, when viewed in the context of savings (cuts to services), indicate that the ACT Government is still far from approaching the provision of services and supports for young people and their families in a 'whole of government' planned way.

The Youth Coalition's 2013 /14 ACT Budget Analysis provides a summary of and comment on the initiatives that will have most impact on young people and youth services in the ACT community.

Consideration of the 2012 election commitments and the commitments under the ACT Greens / ACT Labor Parliamentary Agreement (the Parliamentary Agreement) has been included in providing comment and analysis of the Budget.

The Youth Coalition's 2013 /14 ACT Budget Analysis is divided into two parts:

- Part 1: Overview and Media Releases (this document)
- Part 2: Expenditure Initiatives and Capital Works

Each part can be downloaded from www.youthcoalition.net or accessed in hardcopy by calling (02) 6247 3540.

Key Priorities that the Youth Coalition identified in its submission to the 2013 / 14 ACT Budget were:

- Early Intervention and Prevention
- Youth Services
- Education
- Housing and Homelessness
- Health, particularly Mental Health
- Young People and the Law
- Transport and Planning
- Workforce Development and Community Sector

Some of the key initiatives and commitments of the 2013 / 14 ACT Budget in these areas are outlined below. A more comprehensive list of initiatives and analysis is provided under each ACT Government Directorate in *Part 2: Expenditure and Capital Works*.

Early Intervention and Prevention

Addressing the root causes of social disadvantage and vulnerability is a clear policy goal, both locally and nationally, and a common desire in the community service sector. The need for intervention with young people early in the life of any problem, as well as the life of the young person, is clearly articulated in the National Youth Strategy, 2010.¹

The Youth Coalition submission to the 2013 / 14 ACT Budget called for the ACT Government to lead the development of an early intervention and prevention framework that encompasses a whole of government approach to strategies and funding, and engages the broader community including the child, youth, family support, health and education sectors.

While shared agency funding and a whole of government approach to early intervention and prevention services has not been adopted in this Budget initiatives announced for 2013 / 14 ACT included:

- Intervention Services – establishment of a Trauma Recovery and Research Centre

The Youth Coalition welcomes this initiative, which acknowledges therapeutic services are an essential component of a service system that seeks to address the support needs of vulnerable young people and their families.

Youth Services

The Youth Coalition submission to the 2013 / 14 ACT Budget identified youth engagement and therapeutic services as key priorities for investment in services for young people.

The Youth Coalition congratulates the ACT Government in delivering investment in both these areas, which also work towards meeting commitments under the Parliamentary Agreement.

Therapeutic Services for Young People

While the establishment of the Trauma Recovery and Research Centre (discussed in the previous section) is very welcome, the Youth Coalition notes that member agencies have reported unmet demand for community based therapeutic services and programs for young people also.

Youth Engagement

The funding committed under *Youth Engagement and Family Support for Youth* of \$1.13 million in 2013/14 (\$4.93 million over the next 4 years) has been identified to support the following:

- Existing Youth Engagement Services under the Children Youth and Family Services Program;

The Youth Coalition congratulates the ACT Government in listening to the call from young people and the community to re-invest in youth engagement services. It is essential to see this money bolster existing services, which have seen a reduction in funding over the past 18 months. The Youth Coalition looks forward to working with the sector and the Community Services Directorate around the implementation of this and encourages the use of an evidence base, including the Youth Engagement Research Paper (soon to be released by the Youth Coalition and FACT) to inform the expenditure of these funds.

- Funding for a community based transitions worker;

The Youth Coalition welcomes this initiative that partially meets the Parliamentary Agreement to fund a community based service for young people transitioning from care.

- Diversity ACT

The Youth Coalition welcomes initiatives providing additional support to LGBTI communities. We note however that this funding to Diversity ACT is not youth specific.

While it is great to see this injection of monies into youth services, the Youth Coalition notes that there is still work to be done to make sure that the services provided with these funds support those most in need.

Other funding initiatives announced in the 2013 / 14 ACT Budget relating to youth services included:

- Continuation of the Fourth Unit at Bimberi Youth Justice Centre
- Development of an Out of Home Care Strategy
- Children and Young People Death Review Committee
- DisabilityCare – Additional Support for Post-school Options

The Youth Coalition welcomes the range of initiatives in the budget supporting vulnerable young people. It is noted this expenditure is coupled with a number of savings that have been made in expenditure over the coming financial year, including cuts to some programs previously supporting vulnerable young people.

Education

The Youth Coalition submission to the 2013 / 14 ACT Budget called on the ACT Government to: provide full support to the recommendations of the Gonski Review; increase support for preventative and frontline health, mental health and social support programs in schools; improve transitional supports and education pathways for multicultural young people; and, support programs targeting improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

The Youth Coalition applauds the ACT Government for signing on to the National Plan for School Improvement (Gonski) and notes the following 2013 / 14 Budget initiatives to support this:

- ACT Base Funding Adjustment – National Schools Reform
- Savings Reinvestment to Transition to Gonski

Other welcome funding initiatives announced in the 2013 / 14 ACT Budget in Education and Training included:

- Secondary Bursary Scheme
- Special Needs Transport
- Canberra College Cares – New Building at Phillip Campus

The Youth Coalition notes that the details of how the roll out of Gonski reforms in the ACT will affect supports to students experiencing disadvantage and/or at risk of disengaging from education is still to be announced. It is also noted that with the cutting of the Youth Connection Program from the Community Services Directorate the expectation is that Education and Training will support young people who are at risk of disengaging from education as a part of their core business.

Housing and Homelessness

The Youth Coalition submission to the 2013 / 14 ACT Budget included a call for the ACT Government to address housing affordability, particularly for young people. While the Budget outlines some measures to address housing affordability in Canberra such as changes to the land rent scheme and continuing reforms to stamp duty, the Youth Coalition argues more work needs to be done by the ACT Government in this area.

Funding initiatives announced in the 2013 / 14 ACT Budget related to Housing and Homelessness included:

- National Partnership Agreement (NPA) on Homelessness Extension
- Housing and Homelessness Advocacy and Policy Services
- Common Ground Supportive Housing

The Youth Coalition welcomes the commitment to the NPA for a further 12 months, part of the funding for housing and homelessness advocacy committed to in the Parliamentary Agreement. Capital works investment in developing the Common Ground model is also welcome, noting that this is not a youth specific service.

Health and Wellbeing

The Youth Coalition submission to the 2013 / 14 ACT Budget included calling for greater training for frontline healthcare workers to target services to young people, early intervention, outreach and therapeutic mental health services; mental health education provision; and, support to the establishment of a Sobering Up Service Trial for young people aged 16 and 17 years.

Funding initiatives announced in the 2013 / 14 ACT Budget related to Health and Wellbeing included:

- Establish an Outpatient Service for Drug and Alcohol Services
- Enhanced Belconnen Health Centre and Walk-in Centre
- Growth in Community Mental Health Services
- Mobile Dental Clinic

The Youth Coalition welcomes these investments and believes they have the potential to have a significant impact on young people's physical and mental health, social development, educational achievement and contact with the criminal justice system.

While these services are not youth specific the Youth Coalition acknowledges that young people will benefit, particularly if services take steps to ensure they target services to young people and provide more youth-friendly practice.

Young People and the Law

The Youth Coalition submission to the 2013 / 14 ACT Budget identified targeted funding for legal education programs; expansion of programs directed at preventing young people entering incarceration; and additional resources to implement the key actions of the ACT Blueprint for Youth Justice, as some of the key priorities in the area of young people and the law.

Funding initiatives announced in the 2013 / 14 ACT Budget included:

- Fourth Unit at Bimberi Youth Justice Centre
- Community Legal Centres (CLCs) Hub Accommodation
- Official Visitor Scheme
- Alcohol Interlocks

The Youth Coalition welcomes the investment in hub accommodation for CLCs, and the expansion of the Official Visitor Scheme, in particular the appointment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Official Visitors.

The Youth Coalition also strongly supports the introduction of interlocks for all ACT drivers convicted or found guilty of high range or repeated drink-driving offences.

Transport and Planning

The Youth Coalition submission to the 2013 / 14 ACT Budget called on the ACT Government to develop public transport networks to address the needs of young people and to recognise the ACT Government's commitment to becoming a 'Child and Youth Friendly City' with the provision of public space and transport options.

Funding initiatives announced in the 2013 / 14 ACT Budget related to Transport and Planning included:

- Transport for Canberra – Public Transport Improvements, Bus Stop Upgrades to Disability Standards, and Walking and Cycling Infrastructure
- Woden Bus Interchange Redevelopment (Finalisation of Design)

Further, a number of initiatives investing funding in sporting facilities were announced. The Youth Coalition welcomes these and acknowledges that sport plays a prominent role in the lives of young people. Young people in the 'Rate Canberra' 2012 survey identified sport as one of the top three organised activities participated in.ⁱⁱ

Budget initiatives such as fare discounts (public transport improvements), bus upgrades to meet disability standards investment into walking and cycling infrastructure are also welcome, however further investment in public transport and city planning is required to realise the commitment to becoming a 'Child and Youth Friendly City'.

Workforce Development

The Youth Coalition submission to the 2013 / 14 ACT Budget called for investment in the youth and community sector workforce, recognising the value of multi disciplinary approaches, and the role of youth workers in engaging and supporting young people.

The youth sector in the ACT is both diverse and unique in its composition and delivery of services to young people aged 12 – 25 years and their families. It has strong linkages with a range of other sectors in the ACT, including (but not limited to): housing and homelessness, mental health, alcohol and other drugs, education, employment, justice, family support, disability, health, arts and recreation, out-of-home care, and the broader community sector.

While there was no specific commitment to broad youth sector workforce development, the Youth Coalition recognises the commitment under the Children, Youth and Family Services Program Framework to workforce development and will continue to work closely with the ACT Government regarding ongoing implementation of these resources.

Funding announced in the 2013 / 14 ACT Budget did include an initiative to support teachers:

- Investing in Teachers

The Youth Coalition welcomes investment in teacher professional development but calls on the ACT Government to also meet the commitment under the Parliamentary Agreement to progressively expand student assistant services, including social workers, teachers, and school counsellors.

Community Sector

The Youth Coalition submission to the 2013 / 14 ACT Budget also highlighted the need for investment in and support to the community sector that recognises the change in demand for services, and addresses unmet need.

The Youth Coalition acknowledges further investment in some areas of community sector services, such as mental health services, and youth engagement, however overall the community sector will see further tightening of budgets for services.

For example, while the ACT Government has continued the allocation of funding to support pay raises for staff covered by the Fair Work Australia Award Equal Remuneration Order, it is noted that the Community Sector Indexation Rate is 2.85%, which when adjusted with the 0.34% ACT Community Sector Reform initiative works out to be 2.51%. Given inflation and the increase in superannuation percentage from July 1 2014, this means that many of the services who would normally pass on some indexation to staff through wages may not be in a position to do so this year.

References:

ⁱ Office for Youth (2010) *National Youth Strategy*, Australian Government, Canberra.

ⁱⁱ Youth Coalition of the ACT (2012) *Rate Canberra 2012: Findings from the survey of Young People aged 12-25 in the ACT*, Youth Coalition of the ACT, Canberra.



MEDIA RELEASE

Youth Coalition 2013/14 ACT Budget Analysis

No 1

4 June 2013

ACT Budget: Much Detail Still to Come

The Youth Coalition of the ACT, the peak body for youth affairs and young people aged 12 – 25, is pleased to see some spending in services for young people announced in today's ACT Budget, but notes that much of the detail is still to be worked out.

'We were pleased that the ACT Government's election commitment to additional funding for youth engagement services has been realised', said Emma Robertson, Youth Coalition Director.

'This follows campaigning from both young people and the youth sector to ensure that youth services are resourced adequately and available to young people and their families across the Territory'.

The funding committed under *Youth Engagement and Family Support for Youth* of \$1.13 million in 2013/14 (\$4.93 mill over the next 4 years) has been identified to support the following:

- Existing Youth Engagement Services under the Children Youth and Family Services Program;
- Funding for a community based transitions worker; and,
- Diversity ACT

While it is great to see this injection of monies, the Youth Coalition notes that there is still work to be done to make sure that the services provided with these funds support those most in need.

'It is essential to see this money bolster existing services, which have seen a reduction in funding over the past 18 months.' said Ms Robertson.

The Youth Coalition and Families ACT have commissioned a research project which examines the rationale for integrated service delivery for young people, articulates a range of promising models for young engagement, and identifies participation approaches for vulnerable young people.

'It is vital that services are developed in an informed way, utilising the evidence about what is needed and what works in providing key supports to young members of our community.'

For further comment please contact Emma Robertson on 0422 665 469

MEDIA RELEASE

Youth Coalition 2013/14 ACT Budget Analysis

No 2

7 June 2013

ACT Budget: Some Gains, But Do They Balance Savings?

The Youth Coalition of the ACT, the peak body for youth affairs and young people aged 12 – 25, has released its full analysis and comment on the ACT Budget 2013-14 initiatives that will have the most impact on young people and youth services in the ACT community.

‘The ACT Budget 2013-14 contains a number of promising gains for young people, in particular that the ACT Government’s election commitment to additional funding for youth engagement services has been realised. The Budget also recognises the ACT sign on to the National Plan for School Improvement (Gonski reforms), increases funding for community based mental health services, and invests in the establishment of a Trauma Recovery and Research Centre.’ said Emma Robertson, Youth Coalition Director.

‘The Youth Coalition highlights concern however that the new initiatives, when viewed in the context of savings (cuts to services), indicate that the ACT Government is still far from approaching the provision of services and supports for young people and their families in a ‘whole of government’ planned way.’

‘The Youth Coalition submission to the 2013-14 ACT Budget called for the ACT Government to lead the development of an early intervention and prevention framework that encompasses a whole of government approach to strategies and funding, and engages the broader community including the child, youth, family support, health and education sectors.’

‘Addressing the root causes of social disadvantage and vulnerability is a clear policy goal, both locally and nationally, and a common desire in the community service sector.’

‘While shared agency initiative funding and an investment in early intervention and prevention that will have a significant impact on public spending in crisis services may be a while away, the Youth Coalition is pleased to see a number of initiatives that support the most vulnerable young people and their families in the community.’

‘In addition to those already mentioned, funding for a community based youth transitions worker; development of an out of home care strategy; increases to the secondary bursary scheme; an outpatient service for drug and alcohol services; and, expansion of the Official Visitors Scheme, are all welcome initiatives.

For further comment please contact Emma Robertson on 0422 665 469