



**Submission to the *ACT Budget 2017-18***

November 2016

[www.youthcoalition.net](http://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 Indigenous cultures and the invaluable contribution they make to our community.

Submission to the *ACT Budget 2017-18*

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November 2016

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The Youth Coalition acknowledges 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, ACT Shelter, The Women's Centre for Health Matters, and the ACT Council of Social Services. We would also like to thank the team from Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation.

The Youth Coalition receives funding for peak activity (policy development, sector development, advocacy & representation) from the ACT Government - Community Services Directorate.

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# 1. Background

Section 1 of this submission provides contextual information about the Youth Coalition of the ACT, young people in the ACT, the youth sector in the ACT, and the process for developing this submission.

## 1.1 Youth Coalition of the ACT

The Youth Coalition is the peak youth affairs body in the ACT. As a membership based organisation, the Youth Coalition is responsible for representing and promoting the rights, interests and wellbeing of the estimated 78,000 young Canberrans aged 12-25 years and those who work with them.

The general activities of the Youth Coalition fall under four key themes: policy; sector development; advocacy and representation; and, projects that respond to ongoing and current issues.

A key role of the Youth Coalition is the development and analysis of ACT social policy and program decisions that affect young people and youth services. The Youth Coalition facilitates the development of strong linkages and promotes collaboration between the community, government and private sectors to achieve better outcomes for young people in the ACT.

## 1.2 Young People in the ACT

Young people are a distinct population group aged between 12 and 25 years. Although diverse, as a group young people frequently experience systemic disadvantage, discrimination and unequal access to resources. This means that young people who experience other forms of disadvantage, such as poverty or low educational attainment, are amongst the most vulnerable members of the ACT community.

Canberra has one of the youngest populations of any Australian State or Territory, with approximately 78,000 people aged between 10-24 years residing in the ACT, representing more than 20% of Canberra's population.<sup>1</sup> With over one fifth of Canberra's population comprised of young people, it is important that the wellbeing of young people be regarded as an indicator of the ACT's future population health and development.

## 1.3 The Youth Sector in the ACT

The youth sector in the ACT is both diverse and unique in its composition and delivery of services to young people aged between 12 and 25, and their families. A range of professionals work within the youth sector, including generalist youth workers, specialist youth workers, health

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013, *Population by Age and Sex, Regions of Australia*.

workers, mental health workers, alcohol and other drug workers, social workers, counsellors, statutory workers, nurses and doctors, educators, psychologists, family workers, lawyers, volunteers, and management staff.

The youth sector uses a range of service delivery models to support young people. These include centre-based, outreach, street outreach, inreach, case management, case work, residential, crisis support, group-based work, recreation-based activities, and education.

## 1.4 Process for Developing this Submission

The Youth Coalition welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the development of the ACT Budget 2017-18. This submission is based on:

- Ongoing collaborative work with the ACT Peaks Network;
- The Youth Coalition's *Submission to the ACT Budget 2015-16*;
- The Youth Coalition's *Submission to the ACT Budget 2016-17*;
- The Youth Coalition's *Analysis of the ACT Budget 2016-17*;
- The policy positions outlined in the *Youth Coalition Policy Platform*;
- The views of participants of the Youth Coalition's Forums and Networks;
- Previous Youth Coalition submissions to the ACT Government;
- One-on-one consultations with member services and organisations; and,
- Current and topical research on youth affairs.

In 2016 the Youth Coalition undertook the following activities, which have also informed this submission:

- **Rate Canberra**, a survey of over 2000 young people aged 12 - 25 in the ACT & surrounding region. The initial report can be downloaded at <https://members.youthcoalition.net/sites/default/files/documents/Rate%20Canberra%202016%20Report.pdf>
- **2016 ACT Election Activities**, including a workshop with young people and an Election Forum at which young Canberrans spoke to candidates on a range of issues. These presentations can be viewed via:
  - Employment: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cqIRo7Hwn30>
  - Mental Health: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N1Kqiov54rw>
  - Public Transport: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qeACwC6xNww>
  - Education: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a04Usy15k1A>
  - Homelessness: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=APoyzntfgp4>
  - Relationship Violence & Sexual Assault: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I10vWvo-1Ho>
  - Gender & Sexuality: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBueow7X03o>
  - Arts & Recreation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RCjZQhIRyHw>
  - The Environment: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guVIE31\\_liw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guVIE31_liw)

## 2. Introduction

Section 2 provides introductory remarks and overarching recommendations.

### 2.1 Our Vision for the ACT Community

*'In contrast with many cities, our success will not be bought at the expense of equity. In building this city we want contributions to be made by all parts of our diverse and creative community, but are also mindful of the challenges people can face from disadvantage. In embracing and building the Canberra of the future, Canberrans have made it clear that they want this to be a city for all, whatever their race, background, or identity.'*

Canberra: A Statement of Ambition, ACT Government, 2016<sup>2</sup>

The Youth Coalition would like to thank the Chief Minister and Treasurer for the opportunity to provide feedback about priorities for the 2017-18 ACT Budget.

We continue to believe that Canberra is, and should be, the city of choice for young Australians. As a community, our values are in many ways aligned with the values of young people. In recent years, the ACT has taken a stance on human rights, and progressed action politically on issues such as the treatment of asylum seekers, marriage equality, and the environment – all issues that many young Australians feel strongly about.

While we pride ourselves on being a well educated, socially progressive community, this also brings with it the ability and obligation to support the people in our community who are not faring so well. Issues of educational inequity, an overstretched mental health system, high youth unemployment and a lack of affordable housing, mean that some young people in the ACT lack the opportunities that the majority of Canberrans enjoy.

In June 2016, we welcomed the *Social Inclusion Statement* announced with the 2016-17 ACT Budget. We believe this renewed focus on social inclusion and equity necessitates a long term, big picture vision for the 2017-18 Budget, underpinned by the following priorities:

- addressing the social determinants of health;
- investing in early intervention and prevention; and,
- refocusing resources to where they will have long term impact.

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<sup>2</sup> ACT Government, 2016, Canberra: A Statement of Ambition, available at [http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/865482/Canberra-A-Statement-of-Ambition.pdf](http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/865482/Canberra-A-Statement-of-Ambition.pdf)

## 2.2 Social Determinants of Health

In recent years, the Youth Coalition's submissions to the ACT Budget have called for the ACT Government Budget strategy to have a focus on addressing social determinants of health.

For young people, the social determinants of health have significant consequences for their life trajectories. Poverty is a powerful determinant of poor health, and intergenerational poverty (the transmission of poverty from generation to generation) is a major barrier to improving health outcomes and reducing health inequity for the most disadvantaged young people in society.<sup>3</sup>

The Youth Coalition strongly believes that by addressing the social determinants of health, vulnerable young people can be supported to interrupt and/or move out of cycles of poverty and disadvantage, and live healthy, prosperous lives.

This year, the ACT will spend just over half of the Territory budget, around \$2.8 billion, on education and health services. Health is the area our community spends the most public funds on, at approximately \$1.6 billion. Initiatives to support vulnerable Canberrans receive \$510 million, of which we spend approximately \$184 million on housing and homelessness support. The Youth Coalition believes the ACT Government needs to take urgent action to reduce demand on Territory spending for health services into the future.

In our response to the 2016-17 ACT Budget, we welcomed the ACT Government's *Social Inclusion Statement* and commitment to reducing inequality. We were also pleased to see the whole-of-government, whole-of-community approach taken with the *Safer Families* package. We believe this package demonstrates how different areas of Government working together, in partnership with community-based services, can identify and mobilise resources to address key social issues.<sup>4</sup>

The Youth Coalition continues to call on the ACT Government to expand this coordinated approach to other areas of the Territory's budget and invest in addressing the social determinants of health as a strategic approach to reducing unsustainable demand for spending on health services and strengthening the ACT's economic future.

### **Recommendation 1**

Increase investment in coordinated strategies and services that address the social determinants of health.

<sup>3</sup> Commission on Social Determinants of Health, 2008, *Closing the Gap in a Generation: Health equity through action on the social determinants of health*.

<sup>4</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, 2016-17 ACT Budget: Recognising Social Inclusion as a Core Community Value, available at <https://members.youthcoalition.net/sites/default/files/articles-internal/Analysis%20of%20the%20ACT%20Budget%202016-17.pdf>

## 2.3 Early Intervention and Prevention

Alongside our call for a focus on addressing the social determinants of health, the Youth Coalition has also emphasised the need for the ACT Government to shift its tertiary-heavy focus of investment in services to the community sector, and make an even larger commitment to investment in early intervention and prevention initiatives.

Addressing the root causes of social disadvantage and vulnerability is a clear policy goal locally and nationally, and a common desire in the community sector. The Youth Coalition believes that supporting young people and intervening early in the life of any problems, requires a coordinated, planned effort to addressing issues such as social inequality, poverty, mental health, alcohol and other drug use, family support, and child protection concerns.

The Youth Coalition acknowledges that the ACT Government has increased investment in early intervention and prevention initiatives in recent years, such as the Child and Family Centres. However, we believe there is still an overall lack of investment and coordination in this area, resulting in limited community capacity to do early intervention and prevention work. Real progress in addressing social disadvantage will require substantial investment in building capacity across all service systems.

Community services are operating in an environment of constant push to rationalise resources and become more efficient, coupled with the urgent need of people whose lives are affected by poverty, ill health, violence, racism, unemployment, or other forms of disadvantage. This makes striking the right balance of investment in early intervention challenging. In addition, current levels of investment in tertiary/acute services is unsustainable.

The Youth Coalition continues to urge the ACT Government to increase investment in early intervention and prevention as a guiding principle to direct 2017-18 Budget decisions.

### **Recommendation 2**

Increase investment in early intervention and prevention services.

## 2.5 Refocus of Resources

The Youth Coalition acknowledges that recent ACT Budget consultations have asked for submissions to identify areas where savings or efficiencies might be made.

We believe that the best way to make sustainable difference to expenditure is to invest in early intervention and prevention services and address the social determinants of health. These are

long term investments across the budgets of all sections of government, and require strategic perspective that looks beyond the silos of government portfolios.

An understanding of early intervention and prevention and the social determinants of health invites us to consider who is responsible for responses to significant social issues that affect our community across a range of spheres. For example, the prevention of homelessness is a whole-of-government responsibility requiring coordination of the economic policy levers that create jobs; ensure adequate income when people are not in paid work; provide affordable housing; and, enable access to a range of social supports, including services that help people to access jobs.

Further to our overarching recommendations the Youth Coalition has identified further recommendations for the ACT Budget 2017-18, under the following priority areas:

- Education Equity;
- Supporting Youth Mental Health;
- Jobs Creation and Employment Pathways;
- Addressing Youth Housing and Homelessness;
- Services for Children, Young People and Families;
- Access to Transport; and,
- Youth Participation in the Canberra Community.

# 3. Summary of Recommendations

Section 3 provides a summary of all recommendations of this submission. It is vital that these recommendations be referred to in the context of the broader submission.

## 3.1 Key Recommendations

### **Key Recommendation 1**

Increase investment in coordinated strategies and services that address the social determinants of health.

### **Key Recommendation 2**

Increase investment in early intervention and prevention services.

## 3.2 Priority: Education Equity

### **Education Equity: Recommendation 1**

Invest in community services to increase their capacity to respond to and partner with schools and provide targeted intensive supports to young people and their families.

### **Education Equity: Recommendation 2**

Provide case management and group work in schools, and expand resources to expand capacity and reach of services who work collaboratively with schools.

### **Education Equity: Recommendation 3**

Provide targeted support to children and young people, particularly those aged 8-12, to successfully transition from primary to high school.

### **Education Equity: Recommendation 4**

Invest in early identification of disadvantage, and support throughout childhood and teenage years using long term programs.

### **Education Equity: Recommendation 5**

Provide social and emotional support and interventions in the early childhood and education settings that strengthen peer relationships.

**Education Equity: Recommendation 6**

Continue to focus investment in supporting students from key equity groups, including students from low socio-economic backgrounds; students with English as an additional language or dialect; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; and, students with disability.

### 3.3 Priority: Supporting Youth Mental Health

**Youth Mental Health: Recommendation 1**

Invest in community development projects and programs that increase family and community capacity to support the mental health and wellbeing of young people.

**Youth Mental Health: Recommendation 2**

Invest in multidisciplinary teams within schools and community-based youth services to increase their capacity to deliver more integrated, efficient and effective mental health support to students. This support must be available inside and outside of school hours and school terms.

**Youth Mental Health: Recommendation 3**

Prioritise the provision of \$1.6 million to headspace Canberra to employ five more staff and increase their capacity to meet demand for youth mental health support.

**Youth Mental Health: Recommendation 4**

Address the gap between early intervention and crisis services to ensure there is a continuum of care to address the mental health needs of young people.

**Youth Mental Health: Recommendation 5**

Act on the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Service's report on the *Inquiry into Youth Suicide and Self Harm in the ACT*.

**Youth Mental Health: Recommendation 6**

Respond to youth suicide and self-harm, by seeking to:

- Address social determinants of health;
- Invest in early intervention and prevention;
- Address young people's mental health and wellbeing holistically; and,
- Invest in strengths based community development.

**Youth Mental Health: Recommendation 7**

Ensure the active involvement of young people in the planning and development of suicide prevention activities.

### 3.4 Priority: Jobs Creation and Employment Pathways

**Jobs / Employment: Recommendation 1**

Develop and promote local responses to youth unemployment, that involve collaboration between ACT Government, business, schools, services and young people to design targeted local responses, and act on them.

**Jobs / Employment: Recommendation 2**

Increase the availability of flexible programs that provide meaningful work experience, and prepare young people for work in today's world.

**Jobs / Employment: Recommendation 3**

Implement and report on targets and strategies in all ACT Government-funded projects that anticipate creating jobs (such as the infrastructure program) to ensure that these projects employ people from specific demographics who are vulnerable to unemployment, such as young people.

**Jobs / Employment: Recommendation 4**

Invest in a pilot program offering a period of guaranteed employment in ACT Government to young people who are transitioning from Care.

### 3.5 Priority: Addressing Youth Housing / Homelessness

**Youth Housing / Homelessness: Recommendation 1**

Sustain funding to Commonwealth/ACT jointly funded programs under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, even if the Commonwealth withdraws funding, and improve access to emergency housing.

**Youth Housing / Homelessness: Recommendation 2**

All directorates to report on how their roles and responsibilities impact on homelessness and the supply of accessible, affordable housing as part of their annual reporting requirements.

**Youth Housing / Homelessness: Recommendation 3**

Any directorate not already contributing at least one percent of their operating budget to housing and/or reducing homelessness to allocate one percent of their operating budget to fund additional measures that increase provision of services to reduce homelessness and increase supply of accessible, affordable housing.

**Youth Housing / Homelessness: Recommendation 4**

Fund knowledge and skills development so that people working with men and women exiting out-of-home care, mental health, drug and alcohol, acute health care, criminal justice, and homelessness services are able to provide tenancy advice/advocacy/support.

**Youth Housing / Homelessness: Recommendation 5**

The ACT Government divert \$100 million from its investment portfolio in bonds to create an investment fund for community housing providers for the purpose of building new accessible, affordable rental housing. The fund would be held in perpetuity and repaid at government bond rates.

**Youth Housing / Homelessness: Recommendation 6**

Fund the Housing Policy Consortium peak bodies: ACT Shelter, the ACT Council of Social Service, the Youth Coalition of the ACT, and the Women's Centre for Health Matters (WCHM) to continue undertake local original research into housing and homelessness in the ACT.

### 3.6 Priority: Services for Children, Young People and Families

**Services for Children, Young People & Families: Recommendation 1**

Invest in community development projects and programs that increase community capacity to support people with trauma histories.

**Services for Children, Young People & Families: Recommendation 2**

Expand funding for access to the Translation and Interpreting Service (TIS) so that all not-for-profit services working with people experiencing disadvantage that require TIS can access the service.

**Services for Children, Young People & Families: Recommendation 3**

Increase investment in the Children, Youth and Family Services Program.

**Services for Children, Young People & Families: Recommendation 4**

Develop a fit for purpose service procurement framework that includes processes that engage directly with the community to ensure services meet expectations, improve quality, continuity, diversity and sustainability of both the service offer and the workforce. The procurement framework should ensure funder accountability to the community entitled to and/or accessing the service and drive ongoing improvement of procurement processes and outcomes from the perspective of service users.

### 3.7 Priority: Access to Transport

**Transport: Recommendation 1**

Invest in increasing the frequency and hours of availability of public transport in the ACT, with a particular focus on additional evening, late night and weekend services.

**Transport: Recommendation 2**

Investigate and address affordability as a barrier to young people accessing of public transport.

### 3.8 Priority: Youth Participation in the Canberra Community

**Youth Participation: Recommendation 1**

Invest in strategies to engage meaningfully with young Canberrans regarding the Inquiry into the 2016 ACT Election and Electoral Act.

**Youth Participation: Recommendation 2**

Invest in supports to assist young people to access community facilities, grants, and other resources to lead their own activities and projects.

**Youth Participation: Recommendation 3**

Invest in a week long program that celebrates young people's contribution to the Canberra community, to meet the gap that will be left by withdrawal of Australian Government funding to National Youth Week activities.

## 4. Education Equity

See also 5.2 Mental Health Supports in Schools and 6.1 Addressing Youth Unemployment Early

Education is a key area of importance for young people. The important role education plays in a young person's life is well documented, and its impact on future life chances is clear. For young people, whether they engage with education and have positive experiences at school is one of the most significant determinants of their longer-term capacity to fully participate, economically and socially, in our community.

Equity has been a key focus area for the Youth Coalition's advocacy work around education over the last two years. We have been leading an ongoing campaign with the ACT Council of Social Service aimed at highlighting the issues and challenges of educational inequity in the Territory. As part of the campaign, we have engaged with members and stakeholders to develop and refine key priorities and recommendations for government investment in education.

We recognise that not only do schools play an important role in a young person's learning and development, but so does the community that surrounds them. Research shows that when communities and schools are engaged it has positively profound effects on students, teachers, parents and other members of the community.<sup>5</sup>

### 4.1 Educational Inequity in the ACT

*'Equal opportunity is very easily overlooked in the grand scheme of education, but plays a crucial part in the development of any young person, especially if you're coming from a disadvantage, whether that be financial, mental or otherwise. In this area, the ACT does do very well, but there's more work that could be done. By working with parents and teachers we can teach more children who would otherwise be missed by the net.'*<sup>6</sup>

While the ACT has a relatively high standard of education and good outcomes for most young people, inequities still exist in the educational achievement of disadvantaged cohorts of young Canberrans. Our high average attainment works to hide the fact that there are students falling behind, not achieving, and disengaging from school in the ACT.<sup>7</sup>

As a result of the diversity within Canberra's suburbs, most ACT schools have small numbers of highly disadvantaged students, rather than disadvantage being concentrated in a few schools.

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<sup>5</sup> Anderson-Butcher, D., et. al., 2010, *Emergent Evidence in Support of a Community Collaboration Model for School Improvement*, Children & Schools, 32, 3, pp. 160-171.

<sup>6</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, *YouTube: 2016 Election Forum - Micah*, available online at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCFkedXJRqsFD9hx6qxtfr-w>

<sup>7</sup> ACT Government, 2012, *Detecting Disadvantage in the ACT: Report on the comparative analysis of the SEIFI and SEIFA indexes of relative socio-economic disadvantage in the ACT*, ACT Government, Canberra.

In particular, the ACT has the highest in-school variation linked to student socio-economic status of any Australian jurisdiction – basically, within schools across the ACT, students are performing very differently based on their SES background.<sup>8</sup>

## 4.2 Schools and Community Services Working Together

*'Government should invest in community services and schools working together to support young people to remain engaged in school. Schools and teachers have expertise in education side of things, community services are equipped to do the wrap around supports for all other aspects of young people's lives.'*<sup>9</sup>

The Youth Coalition believes that a whole-of-community approach to addressing educational inequity is needed. We recognise that the cultural differences between the education system and community services system can make it challenging to work collaboratively, but we also believe that their strengths complement each other.

Community services have the skills, knowledge and expertise to provide support to schools by working with students to support their educational engagement. In addition, community services often already have relationships with young people (and their families) who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging from education.

Most importantly, the Youth Coalition believes there is a willingness within both the education system and community services system to work collaboratively to improve educational outcomes for these young people.

Initiatives to improve education engagement and attainment are often based on the premise that community services will partner with schools and teachers to provide additional support and programs where needed. In particular, we note a number of initiatives under the current *Schools for All Program* have a focus on schools and community services working together to support students with complex needs.

While the Youth Coalition supports the *Schools for All Program*, we continue to highlight the already stretched capacity of community services in the current funding environment. We would like to see a coordinated funding approach to increase the capacity of community services to respond to and work in partnership with schools to support vulnerable students.

### **Education Equity: Recommendation 1**

Invest in community services to increase their capacity to respond to and partner with schools and provide targeted intensive supports to young people and their families.

<sup>8</sup> Roberts, P. & Leonard, S., 2013, PISA results show ACT schools fare poorly in teaching disadvantaged, accessed 2 July 2015, <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/comment/pisareultsshowactschoolsfarepoorlyinteachingdisadvantaged201312092z1xa.html>

<sup>9</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2015, *Youth Coalition ACT Budget 2016-17 Sector Survey*.

## **Education Equity: Recommendation 2**

Provide case management and group work in schools, and expand resources to expand capacity and reach of services who work collaboratively with schools.

### 4.3 Support for Transitions

*'I did not feel like I was equipped or prepared enough whilst transitioning between different levels of schooling.'*<sup>10</sup>

Youth Coalition members and stakeholders regularly identify that school transitions can be challenging for the young people they work with, particularly in the move from primary to high school. The transition from primary to high school is a period of change in which the risk of disengaging from school is heightened.

*'The evidence from different educational settings tells us that no matter when the transition to secondary occurs ... there is potential for students' education progress to stall if particular measures are not taken to assist them to adjust to their new schools.'*<sup>11</sup>

*'Unsettledness while transitioning between schools causes students to feel especially vulnerable. As a result, they may become disengaged, with the potential of dropping out of school altogether.'*<sup>12</sup>

Youth Coalition members and stakeholders often report concern about the limited support services available to children and young people aged 8 to 12. This service gap means that the children and young people who need additional support as they prepare for and move from primary to high school, are not getting the help they need when they need it. In this case, the risk of disengagement is even higher.

The Youth Coalition acknowledges the support that teachers and schools provide to students during this time, but we also recognise that by nature of this transition, the change in teachers and school environment can be a stressor for young people.

The Youth Coalition believes community services are well-placed and well-equipped to help children and young people navigate the move from primary to high school. While their teachers and school environment will change in this transition, community services are in a position to provide continual support throughout the entire process.

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<sup>10</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, *YouTube: 2016 Election Forum - Micah*, available online at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCFkedXJRgsFD9hx6qxtfr-w>

<sup>11</sup> WA Department of Education, 2013, *Transition from primary to secondary school*.

<sup>12</sup> Hanwald, R., 2013, *Transition between primary and secondary school: Why it is important and how it can be supported*, Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 38(1).

**Education Equity: Recommendation 3**

Provide targeted support to children and young people, particularly those aged 8-12, to successfully transition from primary to high school.

## 4.4 Early Intervention

The Youth Coalition continues to advocate for investment in early intervention and prevention initiatives. Intervening early often prevents the need for more intensive, expensive interventions later, as well as having better outcomes for the community in addressing the cost of health, wellbeing, and social support in the long term.

The known trajectories for young people who disengage from formal education make early intervention in the school setting even more important. The evidence is clear that supporting all young people to maintain pathways to education, training or employment is critical to addressing significant social concerns in our community, such as poverty, homelessness, and unemployment.

**Education Equity: Recommendation 4**

Invest in early identification of disadvantage, and support throughout childhood and teenage years using long term programs.

**Education Equity: Recommendation 5**

Provide social and emotional support and interventions in the early childhood and education settings that strengthen peer relationships.

## 4.5 Support for Key Equity Groups

There are specific groups of young people that face significant barriers to their educational engagement and are therefore more likely to disengage from school.

While socioeconomic status and disadvantage is one risk factor, there are a range of other factors that might also impact on the ability of some young people to succeed in education. A young person may experience difficulties at school for a variety of reasons and there are likely to be multiple, intersecting issues which impact on their lives and make it difficult to remain engaged in education.

The Youth Coalition highlight the challenges faced by students from key equity groups, including

students from low socio-economic backgrounds; students with English as an additional language or dialect; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; and, students with disability.

The Youth Coalition acknowledges that ACT public schools are currently transitioning to a needs based funding model as part of the *Student Resource Allocation Program*. We strongly support the implementation of a needs based funding model and continue to advocate for the full implementation of the Gonski reform agenda.

The Youth Coalition will continue to work with the Education Directorate as the model is being rolled out, and we look forward to the evaluation of the program to ensure it is effectively meeting the needs of all students.

**Education Equity: Recommendation 6**

Continue to focus investment in supporting students from key equity groups, including students from low socio-economic backgrounds; students with English as an additional language or dialect; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; and, students with disability.

## 5. Supporting Youth Mental Health

Mental health issues are likely to be significant in many young people's lives with 25% experiencing a mental health issue in any given year.<sup>13</sup> With approximately 78,000 young people in the ACT, almost 20,000 young Canberrans are likely to experience mental ill health at some point in any given year.<sup>14</sup> Further to this, a 2014 report by Mission Australia and the Black Dog Institute has found that more than one fifth of young people (21.2%) met the criteria for probable serious mental illness.<sup>15</sup>

Young people in the ACT consistently report mental health and wellbeing as a top issue of concern. In the 2016 *Rate Canberra* survey conducted by the Youth Coalition, mental health-related issues featured strongly as a concern for young people in each age bracket (ages 12-15, 16-17, 18-21, 22-25). 'Stress', 'mental health and wellbeing' and 'feeling sad or anxious' appeared in the top five issues of concern across all age brackets.<sup>16</sup>

These findings are reflected in Mission Australia's 2015 survey of 15-19 year olds, in which ACT respondents identified 'coping with stress' (38.7%), 'body image' (32.7%) and 'depression' (24.1%) as three of the top five issues that they were 'extremely concerned' or 'very concerned' about.<sup>17</sup>

Mental health issues can also affect different groups of young people disproportionately. Youth services report that young people experiencing homelessness, alcohol and other drug issues, young carers, multicultural young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and young people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or intersex are often affected in higher proportion. It is important to note the cyclic impact these co-occurring issues can have upon young people.

It has been said that how young people are faring is the litmus test for how our community is really going. While most young Canberrans are well supported to reach their potential and participate in social and economic life, they, like other young Australians, continue to rate mental health as a top issue of concern.

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<sup>13</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009, *Australian Social Trends: Mental Health*, Australian Government, Canberra.

<sup>14</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013, *Population by Age and Sex, Regions of Australia*.

<sup>15</sup> Ivancic, L., Perrens, Fildes, Perry & Christensen, 2014, *Youth Mental Health Report*, Mission Australia and Black Dog Institute.

<sup>16</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, *Rate Canberra 2016*.

<sup>17</sup> Mission Australia, 2012, *Youth Survey 2015*.

## 5.1 Help Seeking and Natural Community Supports

Encouraging appropriate and effective early help-seeking behaviour for mental health issues has been recognised as a key component of prevention and early intervention. Yet, a major challenge is the well-established reluctance of young people to seek professional help.<sup>18</sup>

With one in four young people experiencing a mental health issue in any given year, it is essential that we listen to what they are telling us. When seeking help, young people turn to the people in their lives – family and friends, their teacher, doctor, or co-worker – first to work through things.

In the 2016 *Rate Canberra* survey, respondents were asked what they would do if they felt like they needed support for themselves or a friend in the future. 75% indicated they would talk to a friend, 62% said they would talk to a family member and 49% said they would talk to a professional. Alarming, 10% said they would do nothing if they felt like they needed support.<sup>19</sup>

In October 2016, the Youth Coalition held a workshop with young people for Mental Health Week which reinforced the need for building community capacity to support young people's mental health and well-being in the ACT.

Participants emphasised the need for key groups in the community to develop skills and knowledge to help support young people to be mentally healthy. In particular, they identified school staff, including teachers, administrative and leadership staff, politicians, paramedics, parents, and journalists.

Participants also acknowledged and discussed the barriers that prevent these key groups from supporting the mental health of young people, including resourcing, staff capability, stigma, and system and service issues. They also felt that young people were not valued and their needs and concerns were not prioritised by the Canberra community.

*'Young people are increasingly disconnected from local, physical community, with less opportunity to have relationships with older people who they might rely on for advice, support, access to employment networking opportunities, etc. The resulting alienation is a major problem for young people who feel unsupported, without clear direction, and looking at an unknown financial and environmental future.'*<sup>20</sup>

The Youth Coalition believes that investment in early intervention and prevention must also acknowledge and engage family and friends in supporting young people's mental health. It is frequently through the intervention of these people that professional mental health care is

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<sup>18</sup> Rickwood, D., Wilson, C., & Deane, F., 2006, *Supporting young people to seek professional help for mental health problems*.

<sup>19</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, *Rate Canberra 2016*.

<sup>20</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2015, *Youth Coalition ACT Budget 2016-17 Sector Survey*.

sought, and the information, beliefs and barriers experienced by family and friends must also be addressed.<sup>21</sup>

The Youth Coalition encourages the ACT Government to redeploy funding to grow investment in projects and programs that seek to increase the community's knowledge about mental health, and support the capacity of young people and their families to seek help.

**Youth Mental Health: Recommendation 1**

Invest in community development projects and programs that increase family and community capacity to support the mental health and wellbeing of young people.

## 5.2 Mental Health Supports in Schools

For young people still at school, the school setting is vital as it provides an opportunistic setting to identify and respond to emerging mental health problems. Fundamentally, schools must have processes in place whereby young people with mental health issues are identified and appropriate interventions provided.<sup>22</sup>

Following the release of the ACT Budget for 2016-17, the Youth Coalition welcomed the ACT Government's investment of \$21.5 million over 4 years to support the implementation of the *Schools for All Program*, including the funding of an additional 26 FTE allied health professionals in schools as part of this package.

We also acknowledge the recent election commitments made by both ACT Labor and the ACT Greens for additional school psychologists. ACT Labor committed \$6.7 million for 20 new psychologists and the ACT Greens promised 4 new psychologists.

While the Youth Coalition welcomes this investment in clinical mental health support for students, we continue to advocate for a cross-sector, co-ordinated and comprehensive approach to ensure access for students and families outside of school hours and school terms.

In addition to school psychologists, we call for investment in strengthening the capacity of multidisciplinary teams within schools, as well as community-based youth services, to support the wellbeing of students. We highlight the need for support to be available not only during school hours, but after school and over the holiday periods as well.

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<sup>21</sup> Rickwood, D., Wilson, C., & Deane, F., 2006, *Supporting young people to seek professional help for mental health problems*.

<sup>22</sup> Rickwood, D., 2005, *Supporting young people at school with high mental health needs*.

*'Imagine having a hospital with only one surgeon, schools are too stretched and counsellors and psychologists are either never available or there is too many processes to get an appointment with them.'*<sup>23</sup>

### **Youth Mental Health: Recommendation 2**

Invest in multidisciplinary teams within schools and community-based youth services to increase their capacity to deliver more integrated, efficient and effective mental health support to students. This support must be available inside and outside of school hours and school terms.

## 5.3 Reducing Wait Times

Long wait times for youth mental health services is a significant issue in the ACT and can act as a barrier to seeking help. Young people and service providers consistently raise concern that our service system has significant bottlenecks in referrals resulting in long wait times for young people seeking help. For example, headspace Canberra's wait list has previously blown out to 6-8 weeks for assessment.

*'There is still little support for young people with mental health issues. Currently most free or low cost mental health services in the ACT have wait-lists of more than 6 weeks. If support isn't available when they seek it, that can be a barrier for young people seeking help in the future.'*<sup>24</sup>

*'When a young person contacts or is referred to headspace, there is a 4-6 week wait period for a simple intake phone call/interview. There is then another 2-4 week wait to see a psychologist. This is completely unacceptable.'*<sup>25</sup>

The Youth Coalition welcomes the recent election commitment by ACT Labor for \$1.6 million to employ five more staff at headspace Canberra. This is particularly significant in light of the recent changes to the headspace funding model under the new Primary Health Networks (PHNs).

In our recent Submission to the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Service Inquiry into Youth Suicide and Self-Harm, the Youth Coalition raised concerns about the impact of the national mental health reforms and commissioning role of the Primary Health Networks (PHNs) on the headspace Canberra centre.

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<sup>23</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, Consultations with young people during Mental Health Week 2016.

<sup>24</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2015, *Youth Coalition ACT Budget 2016-17 Sector Survey*.

<sup>25</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, Interviews with frontline youth workers for Submission to the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Service *Inquiry into Youth Suicide and Self-Harm*.

As part of the national mental health reforms, headspace contracts and compliance were transferred to the PHNs on 1 July 2016. Under this new model, headspace centres are funded at current level with *no growth* for 2 years with no funding certainty beyond June 2018.

We consistently receive feedback about the crucial role headspace plays in supporting young people in the ACT, and the urgent need for increased resources and capacity. Demand for the service has grown 10% each year and the long wait times (up to 8 weeks for initial assessment) demonstrates the service is consistently stretched to meet demand.

In our Submission to the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Service Inquiry into Youth Suicide and Self-Harm, we called for an increase in resourcing and capacity of headspace Canberra. We urge the ACT Government to prioritise the additional \$1.6 million for headspace Canberra in the 2017-18 ACT Budget.

### **Youth Mental Health: Recommendation 3**

Prioritise the provision of \$1.6 million to headspace Canberra to employ five more staff and increase their capacity to meet demand for youth mental health support.

## 5.4 Gap Between Early Intervention and Crisis Support

In Youth Coalition interviews with services in April 2016, frontline youth workers highlighted the significant gap that exists between early intervention mental health services and crisis services for young people in the ACT. Youth workers also report this service gap is even more apparent for young people aged 18 to 25.<sup>26</sup>

*'There isn't very many, if any targeted services for people who are between the early intervention stages and those in a serious or crisis state. In the 18-25 age range there is even less support and resources available.'*<sup>27</sup>

More specifically, headspace Canberra staff identified this gap as a significant issue for young people with severe mental health concerns. Young people deemed high-risk, and therefore not suitable for the headspace early intervention model, continue to access this service because there are no other supports available to them.<sup>28</sup>

*'Often there are gaps between the level and nature of support that headspace offers and the level and nature of support that community-managed and crisis services offer. In these instances, headspace is not able to provide sufficient protection for the young*

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<sup>26</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, Submission to the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Service Inquiry into Youth Suicide and Self-Harm.

<sup>27</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, Interviews with frontline youth workers for Submission to the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Service Inquiry into Youth Suicide and Self-Harm.

<sup>28</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, Submission to the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Service Inquiry into Youth Suicide and Self-Harm.

*people deemed high-risk but who may not be severe enough to require support from one of the crisis services. As a result, the majority of these young people will continue to access services through headspace. Therefore, the needs of these young people are not being fully met and some will continue to practise self-harming behaviours.’<sup>29</sup>*

#### **Youth Mental Health: Recommendation 4**

Address the gap between early intervention and crisis services to ensure there is a continuum of care to address the mental health needs of young people.

## 5.5 Addressing Youth Suicide and Self Harm

In March/April 2016, the Youth Coalition welcomed the opportunity to provide a written submission and appear at a public hearing for the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Service (the Standing Committee) *Inquiry into Youth Suicide and Self-Harm* (the Inquiry).

The Youth Coalition was pleased to see many of the issues we raised reflected in the Standing Committee’s report published in June 2016. We believe, however, that the three recommendations do not go far enough to effect the change that is needed to respond to youth suicide and self harm in the community. It is imperative that, as a community, we act quickly on an issue as pressing as youth suicide and self harm. In addition, the timing of the Inquiry, only months before an ACT Election, has meant little has been done in follow up from the Inquiry.

The Youth Coalition believes the first budget of the new Assembly provides a timely opportunity for the ACT Government to renew its commitment to addressing youth suicide and self harm in the ACT. We call on the ACT Government to review the Standing Committee’s report and respond to youth suicide and self-harm, by seeking to:

- Address the social determinants of health;
- Invest in early intervention and prevention;
- Address young people’s mental health and wellbeing holistically; and,
- Invest in strengths based community development.

We urge the ACT Government to ensure that young people are involved in the planning and development of suicide prevention activities in the ACT. Over the last 2 years, the Youth Coalition has built a network of young people who are passionate about improving the mental health and wellbeing of young people in our community. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the ACT Government and support young advocates to be involved in the planning and development of suicide prevention activities in the ACT.

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<sup>29</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, Interviews with young people for Submission to the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Service *Inquiry into Youth Suicide and Self-Harm*.

**Youth Mental Health: Recommendation 5**

Act on the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Service's report on the *Inquiry into Youth Suicide and Self Harm in the ACT*.

**Youth Mental Health: Recommendation 6**

Respond to youth suicide and self-harm, by seeking to:

- Address social determinants of health;
- Invest in early intervention and prevention;
- Address young people's mental health and wellbeing holistically; and,
- Invest in strengths based community development.

**Youth Mental Health: Recommendation 7**

Ensure the active involvement of young people in the planning and development of suicide prevention activities.

# 6. Jobs Creation and Employment Pathways

Youth unemployment continues to be a concern both locally and nationally. Unemployment has a significant impact on individuals and has been linked with poor health outcomes, particularly when it comes to stress and its impact on physical and mental health and wellbeing,<sup>30</sup> as well as society-wide impacts such as reducing the community tax base, and increasing the economic burden on the community.

While there has been a slight improvement, youth unemployment remains high in the ACT, almost three times the overall unemployment rate. In August 2016, youth unemployment was at 10.7% compared to 3.6% for the overall ACT population.<sup>31</sup>

This figure does not take into account young people who are underemployed – those who have some work, but want to work more hours. Compared to other age groups, young people in the workforce are more likely to be underemployed because they are more likely to be employed in non-permanent part-time or casual jobs.<sup>32</sup>

Underemployment figures can be difficult to estimate, however, in the Youth Coalition's 2016 *Rate Canberra* survey 21% of respondents indicated they were looking for work and 46% said they would like to increase the number of hours they currently work. The findings were particularly concerning for those aged 18-21, with 27% of respondents in this age group looking for work and 61% wanting to increase the number of hours they currently work.

These findings suggest that underemployment may be a significant problem for a large proportion of young people in Canberra, particularly those aged 18-21 who may be looking to move out of home and relying on an income to support themselves for the first time.

## 6.1 Addressing Youth Unemployment Early

The Youth Coalition believes that ACT Government agencies, youth and community support services, and the wider community have a shared responsibility to ensure that young people are supported to maximise their engagement in education, training and employment.

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<sup>30</sup> Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2013, *What works? A review of actions addressing the social and economic determinants of Indigenous health*.

<sup>31</sup> Department of Education, 2015, *Labour Force Region (SA4) – Australian Capital Territory*, accessed 27 October 2015, online at [http://lmip.gov.au/default.aspx?LMIP/LFR\\_SAFOUR/ACT](http://lmip.gov.au/default.aspx?LMIP/LFR_SAFOUR/ACT).

<sup>32</sup> Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2014, *Barely Working: Young and Underemployed in Australia*.

We believe more needs to be done to support those at risk of unemployment or underemployment to fully participate in the ACT community and advocate for investment in initiatives that will increase the likelihood that young people will achieve sustainable employment.

In the 2016 Rate Canberra Survey, 48% of respondents felt their current studies were only 'somewhat' preparing them for future employment, and an additional 13% said that their studies were 'not really' or 'not' preparing them at all.<sup>33</sup>

*'I feel like school could teach us more things about the road that lies ahead of us; we do learn a lot of useful information, but not always what's beneficial like writing a resume, applying for jobs, doing a tax return and finding a rental property.'*<sup>34</sup>

The measures necessary to increase the workforce participation of young people include: assisting young people to build their job readiness through targeted and holistic support; meaningful work experience that reflects the strengths and aspirations of a young person; assistance building connections and networks; and, stimulating the availability of entry-level opportunities for young people.<sup>35</sup>

The Youth Coalition is encouraged by promising local projects, such as the *Belconnen Youth Employment Pathways Hub* (the Hub), that are working to address youth unemployment in the ACT.

The Hub was established in April 2016 by Belconnen Community Services (BCS) with the support of an ACT Government Adult Community Education grant. The program offers tailored one-on-one employment support for young people aged 18-24 years who access the Belconnen region. The Hub provides suitable participants with work experience and vocational training at Certificate II and III levels through partnerships with Riverview Projects ACT and the Canberra Institute of Technology.

Since launching in April 2016, 36 young people have accessed employment support through the Hub. Of those, 5 young people have exited the program after obtaining employment and 8 after commencing training or study through BCS. Of the 25 young people currently engaged in the program, 6 live in the Tuggeranong region and travel to Belconnen to take part in the program.

The Youth Coalition believes the Hub is a promising new program providing a coordinated local response to youth unemployment in the Belconnen region. With 6 young people from Tuggeranong accessing the Hub in Belconnen, it appears there is a demand for employment support in Canberra's south. The Youth Coalition continues to call on the ACT Government to

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<sup>33</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, *Rate Canberra 2016*.

<sup>34</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, *Rate Canberra 2016*.

<sup>35</sup> See for example, Anglicare ACT, 2014, *Limiting Futures: Youth Unemployment in the ACT*; Anglicare Australia, 2014, *Beyond Supply and Demand: Addressing the Complexities of Workforce Exclusion in Australia*; and, Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2014, *Investing in Our Future: Opportunities for the Australian Government to Boost Youth Employment*.

support local communities to collaborate to address youth unemployment and underemployment.

The availability of entry-level opportunities is also a key issue for young people in the ACT. It is real work experience, in combination with qualifications, skills, and a good network, that provide opportunities for young people to engage meaningfully and sustainably in the labour market.

The Youth Coalition understands the ACT Government's business development strategy and increased infrastructure spending are key ways that the Government supports employment growth. We encourage the ACT Government to implement and report on targets and strategies to ensure that these projects employ people in the community most vulnerable to unemployment, particularly young people.

**Jobs / Employment: Recommendation 1**

Develop and promote local responses to youth unemployment, that involve collaboration between ACT Government, business, schools, services and young people to design targeted local responses, and act on them.

**Jobs / Employment: Recommendation 2**

Increase the availability of flexible programs that provide meaningful work experience, and prepare young people for work in today's world.

**Jobs / Employment: Recommendation 3**

Implement and report on targets and strategies in all ACT Government-funded projects that anticipate creating jobs (such as the infrastructure program) to ensure that these projects employ people from specific demographics who are vulnerable to unemployment, such as young people.

## 6.2 Transitioning from Care into Employment

The Youth Coalition believes that young people who have had significant involvement of statutory services throughout their lives would benefit from further assistance making the transition to independence.

Transitions to independence can be difficult to navigate for anyone, however, for many young people in the community parents and family are able to provide supports, resources, and a buffer to any difficulties along the way. It is a common experience that family play a part in securing employment for young people who don't have work experience or history, particularly as the job market gets tighter and people look to their networks to assist.

As included in our last two submissions to the ACT Budget, the Youth Coalition believes the ACT Government, as a body exercising aspects of parental responsibility for children and young people in care, could consider guaranteeing a period of employment for young people who are transitioning from care. We understand that the number of young people exiting care each year in the ACT is around 35-50.

The Youth Coalition believes that a period of guaranteed employment, coupled with available support through the existing Youth Transition Team, would mean young people transitioning from care would be supported to navigate their way to independence and economic participation. It must be a key priority for the ACT Government to reduce, or even eliminate, the known pathways from statutory care to homelessness, poverty, and continuing cycles of disadvantage.

**Jobs / Employment: Recommendation 4**

Invest in a pilot program offering a period of guaranteed employment in ACT Government to young people who are transitioning from Care.

# 7. Addressing Youth Housing and Homelessness

Addressing youth homelessness and improving the supply of affordable housing and has been a key policy focus area for the Youth Coalition for a number of years. Housing is a fundamental determinant of health, wellbeing, social connection, and workforce participation.

The complexities and issues faced by young people experiencing homelessness are still in need of more attention. For many young people, simply providing a place to live is insufficient to addressing the root causes of homelessness, and does not always end the potential pathways to homelessness in later life. Issues around mental health, employment, education, alcohol and other drug use can be barriers to stable housing.

The Youth Coalition continues to work closely with the ACT Peaks Network and the team at ACT Council of Social Services (ACTCOSS) to build a common position across the entire ACT community sector on how best to address housing and homelessness. The Youth Coalition applauds the community sector for its continued commitment to speaking with unity on this issue, with the aim to identify strategies that will address homelessness and housing affordability for all people experiencing disadvantage in the ACT.

For a full list of the joint community sector recommendations related to housing and homelessness, please refer to ACTCOSS' submission to the ACT Budget 2017-18.

## 7.1 Addressing Youth Homelessness and Housing Affordability

Homelessness is fundamentally a failure of economic policy settings (labour market, housing market, income support) and secondly a failure of existing services and supports to respond to individual vulnerabilities. Income poverty and a failure of the housing market to offer a product to low income households are a substantial cause of homelessness in the ACT.

An understanding of the social determinants of health invites us to consider who is responsible for responses to homelessness. The prevention of homelessness is a whole-of-government responsibility requiring collaboration between the economic policy levers that create jobs, ensure adequate income when people are not in paid work, provide affordable housing and enable access to a range of social supports, including services that help people access employment.

The private rental market in the ACT is amongst the hardest to access in Australia. Many young people report difficulty in gaining entry to private rental properties, due to cost, availability, and discrimination, and consistently report experiencing financial hardship associated with the high

cost of living and the relatively expensive rental market in Canberra.

In the 2016 Rate Canberra Survey, 40% of respondents aged between 18-25 were paying more than \$200 per week for rent, board or mortgage. Respondents in this age bracket also indicated they experience worries around not having money for expenses.<sup>36</sup>

*'Canberra is a great place to live with clean air and parks, although the current housing prices make it difficult for young people to access the property market.'*<sup>37</sup>

Further to this, the 2016 Anglicare Rental Affordability Snapshot found that young people who receive a Centrelink benefit have no affordable options in the rental market, even in shared accommodation.<sup>38</sup>

The Youth Coalition highlights that the following recommendations were jointly developed by the ACT Peaks Network and ACTCOSS:

**Youth Housing / Homelessness: Recommendation 1**

Sustain funding to Commonwealth/ACT jointly funded programs under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, even if the Commonwealth withdraws funding, and improve access to emergency housing.

**Youth Housing / Homelessness: Recommendation 2**

All directorates to report on how their roles and responsibilities impact on homelessness and the supply of accessible, affordable housing as part of their annual reporting requirements.

**Youth Housing / Homelessness: Recommendation 3**

Any directorate not already contributing at least one percent of their operating budget to housing and/or reducing homelessness to allocate one percent of their operating budget to fund additional measures that increase provision of services to reduce homelessness and increase supply of accessible, affordable housing.

**Youth Housing / Homelessness: Recommendation 4**

Fund knowledge and skills development so that people working with men and women exiting out-of-home care, mental health, drug and alcohol, acute health care, criminal justice, and homelessness services are able to provide tenancy advice/advocacy/support.

<sup>36</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, *Rate Canberra 2016*.

<sup>37</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, *Rate Canberra 2016*.

<sup>38</sup> Anglicare Australia, 2016, *Rental Affordability Snapshot 2016*, available at <http://www.anglicare.asn.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/rental-affordability-snapshot-2016.pdf?sfvrsn=7>

**Youth Housing / Homelessness: Recommendation 5**

The ACT Government divert \$100 million from its investment portfolio in bonds to create an investment fund for community housing providers for the purpose of building new accessible, affordable rental housing. The fund would be held in perpetuity and repaid at government bond rates.

**Youth Housing / Homelessness: Recommendation 6**

Fund the Housing Policy Consortium peak bodies: ACT Shelter, the ACT Council of Social Service, the Youth Coalition of the ACT, and the Women's Centre for Health Matters (WCHM) to continue undertake local original research into housing and homelessness in the ACT.

# 8. Services for Children, Young People, and Families

## 8.1 Responding to Trauma

Research demonstrates that unresolved trauma has pervasive effects, and impairs a wide range of functioning. Trauma radically restricts the capacity to respond flexibly to daily stress and life challenges. For example, young people who have complex trauma may have difficulties remaining engaged in school and often have problems with emotional regulation, relationships, attention and reasoning under stress.<sup>39</sup>

Complex trauma is cumulative, repetitive and interpersonally generated. It differs from, and is more common than, single-incident trauma (e.g. post-traumatic stress disorder). Research has established the relationship between overwhelming childhood experiences and emotional and physical health problems in adulthood. Childhood coping mechanisms become risk factors for adult ill health if overwhelming childhood stress is not resolved.<sup>40</sup>

With appropriate intervention, it is possible for people to recover from trauma. Over the last 3 years, the youth sector has had an increasing focus on improving practice in relation to working with young people who have trauma histories. With expertise in this area, the Youth Coalition believes that community youth services are best placed to provide support to young people with a history of trauma.

At the same time, however, we recognise the stretched capacity of community services in the current funding environment and the need for people across many professions (e.g. teachers, health professionals, emergency service professionals) to be trained in trauma-informed practice.

The Youth Coalition acknowledges the investment of some ACT schools in providing trauma training to staff. However, we would like to see a coordinated funding approach to increasing the community's capacity to support people who have experienced complex trauma.

### **Services for Children, Young People & Families: Recommendation 1**

Invest in community development projects and programs that increase community capacity to support people with trauma histories.

<sup>39</sup> Blue Knot Foundation, 2016, *Trauma Informed Practice: Blue Knot Foundation Fact Sheet for Workers in Diverse Settings*, accessed 10 November 2016, [http://www.blueknot.org.au/Portals/2/Fact%20Sheets%20Info/Fact%20Sheet\\_Workers.pdf](http://www.blueknot.org.au/Portals/2/Fact%20Sheets%20Info/Fact%20Sheet_Workers.pdf).

<sup>40</sup> Blue Knot Foundation, 2016, *Trauma Informed Practice: Blue Knot Foundation Fact Sheet for Workers in Diverse Settings*, accessed 10 November 2016, [http://www.blueknot.org.au/Portals/2/Fact%20Sheets%20Info/Fact%20Sheet\\_Workers.pdf](http://www.blueknot.org.au/Portals/2/Fact%20Sheets%20Info/Fact%20Sheet_Workers.pdf).

## 8.2 Support for Culturally & Linguistically Diverse Young People

As a population group, young people frequently experience systemic disadvantage, discrimination and unequal access to resources. In addition, there are certain groups of young people that face additional barriers in participating socially, economically and politically in Australian society. While cultural diversity provides a rich and positive contribution to Australian society, multicultural young people may face a number of issues that make them a vulnerable social group.<sup>41</sup>

Multicultural young people are a diverse group encompassing young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, asylum seekers and newly arrived young people, as well as first and second generation Australians. As a collective, multicultural young people may also be referred to as culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD).

The ACT community is culturally diverse, with 24% of the population having been born overseas.<sup>42</sup> The CALD Youth Census Report 2014 found that, of the 67,341 young people in the ACT in 2011, 10,980 (16.3%) were born overseas and 16,362 (24.3%) were culturally and linguistically diverse.<sup>43</sup>

For multicultural young people, especially newly arrived and refugee young people who often possess a low English proficiency, communication is a significant issue. Multicultural young people have the right to communicate in their first or chosen language and effective communication will often require the use of appropriately skilled and trained interpreters. Therefore, it is best practice to engage an interpreter when a young person speaks limited or no English; speaks basic English but is under stress; when discussing important or sensitive information; or when a young person requests an interpreter.<sup>44</sup>

Evidence shows, however, that services are not engaging interpreters when required.<sup>45</sup> In a 2015 survey of child, youth and family services in the ACT, 15 out of 24 respondents (63%) identified that their service does not regularly use interpreters when working with young people from CALD backgrounds with low English language proficiency, or could use some improvement in this area.<sup>46</sup>

The survey results also suggest there is a disconnect between policy and practice in most services. While most respondents reported that their service has policies in place to support the

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<sup>41</sup> Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia, 2014, The CALD Youth Census Report, Melbourne.

<sup>42</sup> Office of Multicultural Affairs, 2015, ACT Multicultural Framework 2015-2020, Community Services Directorate, ACT Government, available at: <http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/multicultural/act-multicultural-framework-2015-2020>

<sup>43</sup> Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia, 2014, The CALD Youth Census Report, Melbourne.

<sup>44</sup> The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, 2013, Promoting the Engagement of Interpreters in Victorian Health Services, Victoria.

<sup>45</sup> The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, 2013, Promoting the Engagement of Interpreters in Victorian Health Services, Victoria.

<sup>46</sup> MYAN ACT, 2015, CYFSP Sector Survey 2015, Youth Coalition of the ACT, Canberra.

use of interpreters, most also reported that they do not regularly use them when working with young people from low English language proficiency. One respondent specifically raised interpreters as a significant issue for the child, youth and family sector in the ACT, highlighting that the cost of interpreters is significant and there is no funding to assist services in covering this cost.<sup>47</sup>

Young people are also often required to interpret for family or community members. This often places the young person in stressful and inappropriate situations and can limit the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the information or support.<sup>48</sup> It is not appropriate for multicultural young people to be used as interpreters for family, friends or community members.

As a key challenge for workers and one of the most significant barriers for young people accessing services, the Youth Coalition continues to advocate for the use of interpreters as essential when providing support to young people with low English language proficiency. Increased investment is needed within the service system to ensure services have the budget to use interpreters and that workers are trained to use them.

In their submission to the ACT Budget 2017-18, the ACT Council of Social Service has called for funding for the Translation and Interpreting Service to be expanded. The Youth Coalition supports this recommendation:

**Services for Children, Young People & Families: Recommendation 2**

Expand funding for access to the Translation and Interpreting Service (TIS) so that all not-for-profit services working with people experiencing disadvantage that require TIS can access the service.

## 8.3 Increasing Role and Scope for the Child, Youth & Family Services Program

The Child, Youth and Family Services Program (CYFSP) aims to provide an integrated and collaborative, child centred and family focused service system which meets the needs of vulnerable children, youth and families in our community.<sup>49</sup>

With the implementation of 'A Step Up for Our Kids' the 2015-2020 Out of Home Care Strategy, an increased focus on schools and community services working together to support vulnerable students and their families, and increased community awareness of the impacts of domestic and

<sup>47</sup> MYAN ACT, 2015, CYFSP Sector Survey 2015, Youth Coalition of the ACT, Canberra.

<sup>48</sup> Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2011, Good Practice Guide: Working with Interpreters, Melbourne.

<sup>49</sup> [http://www.assistance.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/293425/Child\\_Youth\\_and\\_Family\\_Support\\_Program.pdf](http://www.assistance.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0007/293425/Child_Youth_and_Family_Support_Program.pdf), accessed 15 Dec 2016.

family violence, the CYFSP program is well placed to be providing much needed and valuable supports to children, young people and families across the ACT.

The CYFSP program also has the capability to work in early intervention and prevention, and in addressing social determinants of health.

However, resources are already stretched, and increased demand for services has not been met with increased funding in this program. The Youth Coalition is concerned that at current capacity, the CYFSP program cannot meet community expectation or effectively address service needs and gaps that have been raised by referring agencies, such as ACT Policing, intake services, and youth engagement workers in recent months. These include:

- Programs working with young people who may be perpetrators of violence in the family home;
- Supports for under 16 year olds who are experiencing homelessness (so ineligible to access homelessness services), but not involved in the care and protection system;
- Non clinical supports for young people who are experiencing bullying;
- Supports for young people who are experiencing mental ill health but are not yet ready or able to access clinical mental health support; and,
- Youth engagement style support for the 'middle years' - 8-12 year olds.

### **Services for Children, Young People & Families: Recommendation 3**

Increase investment in the Children, Youth and Family Services Program.

## 8.4 Developing a Fit for Purpose Procurement Framework

In September 2016, the Youth Coalition welcomed the launch of the ACT Community Services Industry Strategy 2016-2026 (the Strategy). We acknowledge the significant work of ACTCOSS in supporting community sector engagement in the development of the Strategy.

Earlier in 2016, KPMG released a Scoping Paper that identified contracting and procurement reforms as one of the challenges facing the community services industry in the ACT.<sup>50</sup> One of the outcomes outlined in the Strategy is that *'industry and government work together on the development of procurement models which support sustainability.'*<sup>51</sup>

In their submission to the ACT Budget 2017-18, the ACT Council of Social Service has called for funding for the development of a fit for purpose service procurement framework. The Youth Coalition supports this recommendation:

<sup>50</sup> KPMG, 2016, Development of a Community Services Industry Plan in the ACT: Industry Scoping Paper, available at <http://www.actcoss.org.au/sites/default/files/public/documents/2016-kpmg-scoping-paper-industry-plan-feb2016.pdf>

<sup>51</sup> Joint Community Government Reference Group, 2016, ACT Community Services Industry Strategy 2016-2016, available at <http://www.actcoss.org.au/sites/default/files/public/documents/2016-ACT-Community-Services-Industry-Strategy-pdf-version-1.pdf>

**Services for Children, Young People & Families: Recommendation 4**

Develop a fit for purpose service procurement framework that includes processes that engage directly with the community to ensure services meet expectations, improve quality, continuity, diversity and sustainability of both the service offer and the workforce. The procurement framework should ensure funder accountability to the community entitled to and/or accessing the service and drive ongoing improvement of procurement processes and outcomes from the perspective of service users.

## 9. Access to Transport

Public transport is often a young person's primary means of transportation. More than a third of respondents to the 2016 Rate Canberra Survey reported using public transport almost every day, with an additional 23% using it at least once a week.<sup>52</sup> Public transport services, therefore, need to be affordable, safe and timely in order to facilitate young people's participation in employment, education, recreation and social activities.

In responding to the 2016 Rate Canberra Survey, young Canberrans identified limited transport accessibility as a barrier to their participation in employment, education, recreational and social activities.<sup>53</sup>

In ACT Election 2016 workshops with young people, participants identified that there is a need for more buses, in particular additional evening, late night and weekend services.<sup>54</sup> This is particularly important for young people who are more likely than the general population to be engaged in part-time employment or recreational activities during the evenings and weekends, or those who live in Canberra's outer suburbs.

The Youth Coalition was pleased to see commitments to improving public transport included in the new Parliamentary Agreement between ACT Labor and ACT Greens for the 9th Legislative Assembly for the ACT. We applaud the ACT Government for the commitment to implementing free bus travel for seniors and concession card holders on all routes, but are disappointed that students have been excluded.<sup>55</sup>

Young people often identify cost of public transport as difficult. In the 2016 Rate Canberra Survey, 47% of respondents indicated the "cost of travel" was an aspect they disliked about catching the bus.<sup>56</sup> The 2016 ACTCOSS ACT Cost of Living Report found that:

*'Newstart and Youth Allowance recipients spend more on transport per week than any of the other government transfer recipients. This is quite significant, as the base payment rate for them is much lower than the Age Pension and Disability Support Pension. It follows, therefore, that any increases in public transport prices will impact more on unemployed people and students than any other low-income group.'*<sup>57</sup>

The Youth Coalition calls on the ACT Government to increase the frequency, hours of

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<sup>52</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, *Rate Canberra: Findings from the Survey of Young People Aged 12-25 in the ACT*.

<sup>53</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, *Rate Canberra: Findings from the Survey of Young People Aged 12-25 in the ACT*.

<sup>54</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, *Canberra, Let's Talk: ACT Election Workshop for Young People*.

<sup>55</sup> ABC News, 2016, *Parliamentary Agreement for the 9th Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory*, available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-10-30/labor.-greens-parliamentary-agreement-2016/7978410>

<sup>56</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, *Rate Canberra: Findings from the Survey of Young People Aged 12-25 in the ACT*.

<sup>57</sup> ACT Council of Social Service, 2016, *Full Data Report: ACT Cost of Living Report: Transport, 2016*, p. 50.

availability and affordability of public transport across the ACT.

**Recommendation 30**

Invest in increasing the frequency and hours of availability of public transport in the ACT, with a particular focus on additional evening, late night and weekend services.

**Recommendation 31**

Investigate and address affordability as a barrier to young people accessing of public transport.

# 10. Youth Participation in the Canberra Community

The Youth Coalition is strongly committed to the concept of meaningful youth participation in service delivery and policy development, in recognition that young people have the right to have a say in decisions affecting their own lives. Young people's participation in decisions that affect them and the life of their community is valuable and has a range of positive outcomes for young people and those who engage with them.

Benefits of youth participation for organisations and communities include:

- bringing new perspectives;
- ensuring programs are responsive and effective;
- community capacity building;
- promoting inclusive and cohesive communities; and,
- developing social competence and social responsibility.<sup>58</sup>

Participation should be meaningful and this can only occur when young people are adequately informed and supported in their involvement, their contributions are valued, they believe the work they are doing has a purpose, and they see changes occur and are provided with feedback.

## 10.1 Youth Participation in Decision Making

Young people often experience a range of systemic barriers to their engagement and participation, which include: age discrimination (at an individual, community and societal level); limited access to opportunities; and inadequate resourcing to support meaningful youth participation.

Youth Coalition consultations on this issue highlight that many young people do not feel engaged with decision making at a local or national level and describe a disconnect between what young people think themselves and what decision-makers believe young people 'need'.

Young people also feel that governments do not support genuine youth consultation, either in the methods used, or in taking expressed views seriously. They report feeling that governments only engage with young people who are highly educated or already actively engaged with community consultative processes. Young people identified that they would like a greater say in issues that affect them directly, such as health and education funding and delivery. The Youth Coalition believes that young people should have opportunity to provide input and engage on all issues, not just those deemed to be 'young people's' issues.

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<sup>58</sup> Australian Infant, Child, Adolescent and Family Mental Health Association, 2008, *National Youth Participation Strategy Scoping Project Report*.

The Youth Coalition welcomed the commitments under the *Parliamentary Agreement for the 9th Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory* to:

- Strengthen community consultation processes, including through the use of deliberative democracy strategies, so that diverse views are taken into account in major project proposals; and,
- Establish a Select Committee to review the operation of the 2016 ACT election and Electoral Act, and make recommendations on lowering the voting age, improving donation rules and reporting timeframes, and encouraging more people to enrol, vote and participate more widely in political activity.

The Youth Coalition believes, however that participating in a 'Select Committee' may be a daunting process and is concerned that the Inquiry opened 15 December 2016 (effectively the start of school holidays) and submissions are due mid March 2017, just 6 weeks after school recommences (less for University students). This time frame makes it even more difficult for schools and community groups to engage with young people regarding the Inquiry.

#### **Youth Participation: Recommendation 1**

Invest in strategies to engage meaningfully with young Canberrans regarding the Inquiry into the 2016 ACT Election and Electoral Act.

## 10.2 Youth Led Sports, Arts, Recreation and Events

Youth participation requires a commitment from across government, services and other stakeholders, to adequately resource the process in order to build a culture where young people are able to contribute in valuable and meaningful ways. Without adequate resources and commitment to the implementation of youth participation policies and practices, services are at risk of engaging young people in tokenistic ways.

The 2016 Rate Canberra survey showed us that 62% of respondents participate in sports activities, and over 1/3 of young people volunteer in their community.

Accessing activities can be difficult for many young people, so even if they want to participate in things, they aren't able to. 40% say that cost is a barrier, and 33% say that being unable to travel to an activity is an issue for them.<sup>59</sup>

Many young Canberrans are actively seeking to contribute to community life, through activities such as leading sport, arts, or recreational groups, organising events, or bringing together other young people to connect around issues such as volunteering, environmentalism, reconciliation, sexuality and gender diversity and much more.

Young people have consistently raised with the Youth Coalition that they experience further barriers to active participation in community, particularly where activities are youth-led,

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<sup>59</sup>Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, *Rate Canberra Survey*.

organised, or facilitated by young people themselves. Issues such as navigating the processes around gaining permission to access public space (which changes frequently), insurances and developing risk management plans, learning how to write grant applications or proposals for in kind support, and finding the right people in the community to seek support from, and being taken seriously have all been highlighted.

#### **Youth Participation: Recommendation 2**

Invest in supports to assist young people to access community facilities, grants, and other resources to lead their own activities and projects.

### 10.3 National Youth Week

*'It's great to see the students get so involved in the planning and organising of this event... It provided them with a sense of belonging.'*<sup>60</sup>

National Youth Week is an annual, week-long celebration of young people (aged 12–25) throughout Australia. It is a joint initiative of the Australian, State, Territory and Local Governments, however the Australian Government has ceased commitment to funding National Youth Week after 2017.

In the ACT, National Youth Week 2016 saw a total of 64 events, and the official launch, held during the National Youth Week Festival, included the presentation of the Young Canberra Citizen of the Year Awards. Importantly, many of the National Youth Week events held in the ACT over many years have also targeted specific groups of young people, in particular young people experiencing disadvantage or other vulnerability.<sup>61</sup>

Having a big, public events as part of the National Youth Week calendar has played a significant role in lifting the profile of young people in the eyes of the general public. Young people have been involved in all aspects of planning and organising activities and events for National Youth Week, including overarching territory wide planning. Young people have also frequently volunteered their time to provide advice to the ACT Government, the Youth Coalition, and other organisations involved in event planning, and have been open to sharing their perspectives and shaping National Youth Week to be a celebration for them, by them.<sup>62</sup>

The partnership between ACT Government and the community sector has been a key contributor to the success of National Youth Week in the ACT, as has the small seeding grants program, which has encouraged variety in events, and provided opportunities to ensure that groups of vulnerable young people are actively included in the celebrations.

The withdrawal of Australian Government funding to National Youth Week, effectively means that these activities will cease after April 2017. States and territories are looking to opportunities locally to find resources to continue to actively celebrate and recognise young people's

<sup>60</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, *NYW Participant Feedback Survey*.

<sup>61</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, *NYW Report*.

<sup>62</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, *NYW Report*.

contribution to and participation in community.

*'I felt very proud of my work and in my abilities... I would love to be involved in something like this again.'*<sup>63</sup>

**Youth Participation: Recommendation 3**

Invest in a week long program that celebrates young people's contribution to the Canberra community, to meet the gap that will be left by withdrawal of Australian Government funding to National Youth Week activities.

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<sup>63</sup> Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, *NYW Participant Feedback Survey*.