



youth coalition

of the ACT

Submission to the *ACT Government*
2012 - 2013 Budget

February 2012

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 Government 2012 - 2013 Budget*
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February 2012

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Thank you to the Youth Coalition staff team for their support.

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1. Introduction

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

1.1 About the Youth Coalition of the ACT

The Youth Coalition is the peak youth affairs body in the ACT. Comprised of 100 organisational and individual members, the Youth Coalition is responsible for representing and promoting the interests and wellbeing of young people aged 12 to 25 years and those who work with them.

The Youth Coalition is represented on many ACT Government advisory structures and provides advice to the ACT Government on youth issues, along with providing information to youth services about policy and program matters.

A key role of the Youth Coalition is the development and analysis of ACT social policy and program decisions for 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, and often discrete, population group aged between 12 and 25 years. Young people frequently experience systematic and systemic disadvantage, discrimination and unequal access to resources.

Canberra has one of the youngest populations of any Australian State or Territory, with approximately 70,000 young people residing in the ACT, representing almost 22% of Canberra's population.¹ 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 Process for Developing and Format of this Submission

The Youth Coalition welcomes the opportunity to input into the development of the 2012 – 2013 ACT Government Budget. This submission is one of many made over a 15 year period by the Youth Coalition and is based on the following:

- The priority areas highlighted in the *Youth Coalition Strategic Plan 2011-14*;
- The policy positions outlined in the *Youth Coalition Policy Platform*;
- The issues raised at consultations on the 2011/12 ACT Government Budget and 2012/13 ACT Government Budget;
- The issues raised at consultations on the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 - 2014;
- Issues raised by members in the transition to the new Child, Youth and Family Services Program;
- 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.

The public consultation for the 2012 – 2013 ACT Government Budget, led by Treasurer Andrew Barr MLA, includes inviting comments through social media websites, such as Facebook and Twitter. As such, in addition to this written submission, the Youth Coalition has communicated key recommendations through these social media platforms. Follow the Youth Coalition on Twitter at @youthco_act or search for and 'like' the Youth Coalition's Facebook page to receive updates.

The central focus of the Youth Coalition's submission to the 2012 – 2013 ACT Government Budget is workforce development for the youth and family sector. This is outlined in Section 3 of this document. Workforce development is foundational to many of the recurring systemic issues in the community sector.

The Youth Coalition has also identified key issues for consideration in the areas of housing and homelessness, education and justice. These areas are discussed in Section 4 of this submission.

Section 5 focuses on early intervention and prevention, a key whole of government and community approach to the provision of services in the ACT community.

2. Summary of Recommendations and Comments

Section 2 provides a summary of the recommendations and comments for the 2012 - 2013 ACT Government Budget. It is vital that these recommendations be referred to in the context of the broader submission.

The public consultation for the 2012 – 2013 ACT Government Budget, led by Treasurer Andrew Barr MLA, includes inviting comments through social media websites, such as Facebook and Twitter. As such, in addition to this written submission, the Youth Coalition has communicated key recommendations through these social media platforms. Follow the Youth Coalition on Twitter at @youthco_act or search for and ‘like’ our Facebook page to receive updates.

Workforce Development – Whole of Government Approach

1. The central focus of the Youth Coalition’s submission to the 2012 – 2013 ACT Government Budget is Workforce Development for the youth and family support sector.

2. The Youth Coalition welcomes the commitment by the ACT Government to funding the outcomes of the Equal Pay Case over the next eight years.

3. Strategies that address workforce capacity and resources to effectively implement change are required.

4. The Youth Coalition participated in and supports the Budget Submission developed by the ACT Community Sector Leaders Forum.

5. A whole-of-government approach is integral to workforce development for the youth and family support sector, which includes a range of cross-sectoral services and programs.

6. Defined career paths and improved conditions will assist in improving recruitment and retention in the youth and family support sector.

7. The ACT Government should explore alternative methods of procuring community services to competitive tendering, which does not support the development of a collaborative and sustainable service sector.

8. The ACT Government should allocate funding to develop an updated Profile of the ACT youth and family sector, building on the 2010 work undertaken by the Youth Coalition.

9. The CYFSP Bus Tour Induction Project should be expanded into the 2012 / 2013 financial year, for workers in CYFSP services and related sectors.

10. Adult support services will require training to work with young people aged 18 – 25 years, who will lose services in the Child, Youth and Family Services Program.

11. Funding for development and evaluation of best-practice resources for youth and family support services and people accessing services, must be identified.

Housing and Homelessness

12. More work must be done to address housing affordability, particularly for young people in the ACT.

13. The ACT Government must rigorously evaluate the new youth housing and homelessness sector reforms, with a commitment to increasing funding where need matches the evidence.

Education

14. The Youth Coalition supports the ACT Student Engagement Framework and its further implementation in schools; in particular the view to include both vulnerable and less vulnerable young people in a holistic strategy.

Youth Justice

15. The Youth Coalition supports a significant investment in the actions to be identified in the ACT Blueprint for Youth Justice, and consultations with young people regarding the make-up of the youth justice system in the future.

16. The Youth Coalition supports the adoption of evidence-based and evaluated programs that seek to reduce recidivism, work towards resolution for both young offenders and young victims, and provide meaningful alternatives to detention if appropriate.

17. Justice Reinvestment models must be explored, piloted and evaluated in the ACT.

Early Intervention and Prevention

18. The Youth Coalition calls on the ACT Government to resource the development of an early intervention and prevention framework that encompasses a whole of government approach to strategies and funding, and engages the broader community, including the children, youth, family support, health and education sectors.

3. Workforce Development

The central focus of the Youth Coalition's submission to the 2012 – 2013 ACT Government Budget is Workforce Development; a critical issue for the youth and family support sector.

3.1 About Workforce Development

Workforce development aims to ensure that responses stem from, and are implemented and sustained by, a well-informed and highly skilled workforce that operates within supportive environments and systems designed to sustain and optimise efforts. Changes and development should concentrate and be addressed on three separate levels:

1. Systems (legislation, policy, funding, recruitment and retention, resources, support mechanisms and incentives);
2. Current workers (formal education, training, workplace training, mentoring, on-the-job learning, on-line learning and best practice guidelines); and,
3. Future workforce (recruitment strategies, offers of education and training, affordable and accessible education and training, ensuring adequate service funding to employ staff and supporting and facilitating policies).²

@youthco_act

*The central focus of our submission to the 2012/13 Budget is Workforce Development for the youth and family sector.
#actbudget*

@youthco_act
*The Youth Coalition welcomes the commitment by the ACT Government to fund the outcomes of the Equal Pay Case.
#actbudget*

The Youth Coalition commends the ACT Government's commitment to funding the outcomes of the Equal Pay Case over the next eight years. The outcome of the case, and the ACT Government's commitment to funding it in the ACT, will greatly support the long-term viability of the community sector and its workforce.

It is important that other initiatives are implemented to complement the wage rises for the community sector, that seek to address workforce development issues.

The ACT Government is currently driving a significant change agenda across key areas of service to young people and their families, particularly in the areas of youth justice; child, youth and family support; youth housing and homelessness; and care and protection.

It is essential that strategies to support this agenda include those that address the workforce capacity and resources to effectively implement change.

@youthco_act

Strategies that address workforce capacity and resources to effectively implement change are required. #actbudget

3.2 Endorsement for the ACT Community Sector Leaders Forum Budget Submission

@youthco_act
The Youth Coalition
supports the Budget
Submission by the ACT
Community Sector Leaders
Forum. #actbudget

The Youth Coalition participates in the ACT Community Sector Leaders Forum, which is an alliance of community sector service provider leaders who have come together in response to the key challenges and opportunities that face the community sector.

The ACT Community Sector Leaders Forum has developed a submission to the 2012 – 2013 ACT Government Budget, and the Youth Coalition supports its key recommendations, namely:

That the ACT Government provide a one off investment to community sector organisations in the order of 15% of the base of contracted services, separate to the recent commitment by the ACT Government to fully fund the Equal Wage Case for community sector workers, untied and in recognition of the significant and growing requirements placed on the sector.³

3.3 Workforce Development in the Youth and Family Support Sector

The Youth Coalition has consistently highlighted and promoted the importance of a workforce development strategy for the youth sector for a number of years.

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

The youth sector also works with a range of population groups, such as young people who identify as: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander; multicultural and newly arrived; gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and/or intersex; carers; homeless or those at risk of homelessness; young women; young men and young parents.

3.3.1 Changes to the Youth Sector in the ACT

In 2012, two significant initiatives will change the landscape of the youth and family support sector. These include the implementation of the new Child, Youth and Family Services Program; and the significant reform of youth housing and homelessness services.

In March 2012, the Community Services Directorate will conclude the existing Youth Services Program and Family Support Program; and formally begin implementing the new Child, Youth and Family Services Program (CYFSP). The transition period will see many workers leave the sector or take on new roles within the CYFSP. Youth workers will be required to have a stronger family focus; and family support workers will be required to expand their skills in working with young people.

In addition, reform to the youth housing and homelessness sector will see the possible closure of some existing services, additional new services, and a change in scope for existing services.

It is vital that the workforce of the youth sector be supported to acquire the skill-sets required to work effectively with young people and their families to ensure that clients are not further disadvantaged in the transition to the new framework.

The Youth Coalition commends the ACT Government for its existing work on workforce development, such as the allocation of professional development funding in the CYFSP; the work of the Children and Young People Sharing Responsibility Committee Workforce Development Sub-Group; and the current Practice Framework Project being implemented by Families ACT, with funding from the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support.

Each of these activities needs to be integrated into a broader workforce development strategy for the youth and family support sector; including those services not funded by the CYFSP; that support children, young people and their families.

There are a number of key components of workforce development that would further assist the youth and family sector to work towards providing cohesive and effective services to children, young people and their families. These include concentrating on workforce development at a systems level, for current workers, and for the future workforce. Each of these components are discussed in further detail below.

3.4 Workforce Development at a Systems Level

In addition to initiatives for the current and future workforce (see Section 3.5), workforce development should focus on identifying and initiating changes at a systems level, in relation to legislation, policy, funding, recruitment and retention, resources, support mechanisms and incentives.

A whole-of-government approach is integral to workforce development for workers in the youth, family and community sectors. The current work being undertaken by the Children and Young People Sharing Responsibility Committee, Workforce Development Sub-group should inform a comprehensive workforce strategy for the youth and family support sectors.

*@youthco_act
A whole-of-government
approach is integral to
workforce development for
the youth and family sector.
#actbudget*

There are a number of components of workforce development for the youth and family sector at a systems level. These include the linkages between the CYFSP and broader youth and community sector, recruitment and retention, and competitive tendering processes.

3.4.1 Linkages with the Broader Youth and Community Sectors

The youth sector in the ACT is broader than those services funded by the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support; and overlaps with a number of other sectors. These include: alcohol, tobacco and other drugs; housing and homelessness; justice; education; health; mental health; disability, arts, out of home care, and the broader community sector.

The Youth Coalition advocates that a comprehensive, good practice workforce development strategy should be targeted at the broader youth and family sector; and not the CYFSP in isolation. This would require a whole-of-government approach.

3.4.2 Recruitment and Retention

Although 'equal pay' will go a long way towards improving recruitment and retention in the youth and family support sector, a workforce development strategy should also consider conditions and career pathways for workers.

Historically, community services have endeavoured to provide additional conditions as an incentive to counteract lower wages (such as salary sacrificing and time in lieu). However, the Youth Coalition's 2010 Youth Sector Workforce Profile (the Profile) found that employees of the ACT Government enjoy similar conditions.⁴

*@youthco_act
Defined career paths and improved conditions will improve recruitment and retention in the youth and family sector. #actbudget*

The Profile also found that only non-government youth sector workers indicated that they intended to stay in the youth sector for one year or less. Conversely, all government respondents indicated that they intended to continue working in the government-based youth sector for 2 years or more.

Community-based youth sector workers indicated that enticements to staying in the youth sector included, among other factors: improved wages and conditions, improved professional recognition of their work, and better defined career paths.

There can be limited career pathways in the youth sector with few opportunities to advance in positions of direct service provision, resulting in many frontline workers moving into management positions or out of the sector, considerably undermining the corporate knowledge of the sector. As such, the youth sector in particular continues to experience pressure in recruiting and retaining fully qualified and / or trained workers.

3.4.3 Competitive Tendering

*@youthco_act
The ACT Government should explore alternative methods of procuring community services, to competitive tendering. #actbudget*

Whilst a competitive tendering environment provides a range of opportunities to services to apply for funding, it does not support the development of a collaborative and sustainable service sector.

It can also disadvantage smaller services that may not have the time or resources to develop high-level tender applications.

The introduction in the recent CYFSP Procurement process of 'best and final offers' was new to the youth sector, and not effectively supported by the ACT Government. It created an environment where

services felt under pressure to do more for less; which is counter-productive to developing a sustainable, effective workforce and sector. Many services already

tender at their base-line level; and this was further undermined in the 'best and final offer' process.

In developing a workforce development strategy, the ACT Government should explore alternative methods of procurement; that supports the establishment of collaborative practice and realistic, sustainable funding contracts.

3.5 Workforce Development for Current Workers and the Future Workforce

*@youthco_act
Funding should be allocated to develop an updated Profile of the ACT Youth and Family Sector, building on 2010 work. #actbudget*

In addition to identifying strategies at a systems level, effective workforce development also initiates changes for the current and future workforce. These can relate to: formal education, workplace training, mentoring, best practice guidelines, ensuring adequate service funding to employ staff, and supporting and facilitating policies.

The 2010 Profile of the ACT Youth Sector Workforce recommended that resourcing be provided to update the Profile biennially; in order to maintain an up-to-date and relevant picture of the youth sector workforce. The Youth Coalition recommends that the

ACT Government provide the relatively small amount of funding required to update the Profile, which could extend to the youth and family support sector, in the 2012 – 2013 financial year.

3.5.1 Training and Professional Development

The youth sector sees some highly skilled and experienced workers, who engage in extremely complex, innovative work with young people, and the Youth Coalition notes the importance of supporting these workers to remain in the sector. The Youth Coalition's 2010 Profile of the youth sector workforce identified that over 50% of workers hold tertiary qualifications⁵. This supports the argument that the youth sector is a highly skilled and motivated workforce.

*@youthco_act
The CYFSP Bus Tour Induction Program should be expanded.
#actbudget*

During and following the transition to the CYFSP and reform of youth housing and homelessness services; the youth and family support sector, and broader community sector, will require a targeted training and professional development strategy, to develop a new set of skills and adapt to the changed environment.

*@youthco_act
Adult services will require training to work with young people aged 18 – 25 who will not receive CYFSP supports. #actbudget*

The Youth Coalition and Families ACT will receive a small amount of funding to implement the CYFSP Bus Tours Induction Project between March and April 2012. This Project will support CYFSP workers to become familiar with the new service system and ways of working within it.

These tours will be based upon the existing 'Comorbidity Bus Tours', which the Youth Coalition coordinates in partnership with the Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug

Association ACT and the Mental Health Community Coalition ACT. These bus tours, which take workers to visit youth, mental health, and alcohol and other drug services are popular and achieve a range of positive outcomes for workers in those sectors.

It will be important for initiatives such as the CYFSP Bus Tours Induction Project to continue in the 2012 / 2013 financial year; to support the induction of both CYFSP workers; but also workers from related sectors that will be required to engage with CYFSP services.

As the development of the CYFSP will result in a loss of services to young people aged 18 – 25 years, it is likely that this will also become a key area for training and professional development, particularly for adult support services that will be required to pick up the gap.

3.5.2 Information and Resources

The development of quality resources, for workers, services and service users is critical to supporting the transition to the CYFSP and youth housing and homelessness reforms.

In previous years, the Youth Coalition has produced the Big Red Book, a directory and handbook for workers, of services that work with young people in the ACT. The Big Red Book has been incredibly successful and useful in assisting workers to 'map' the youth sector, make effective referrals, and improve their practice with young people.

*@youthco_act
Funding for best-
practice resource
development for CYFSP
services and people
accessing services must
be identified.
#actbudget*

There is currently limited funding in the CYFSP to support the development of new information resources for workers, services or clients. In light of the significant changes to the sector, it is essential that good-practice resources are developed to support each of these stakeholder groups to transition to the new framework. The Youth Coalition has a demonstrated expertise in developing resources for the youth sector.

4. Housing and Homelessness, Education and Justice

Section 4 of this submission to the 2012 – 2013 ACT Government Budget focuses on key issues relating to housing and homelessness, education and justice.

4.1 Housing and Homelessness

The private rental market in the ACT is amongst the most expensive and inaccessible in Australia. Many young people report difficulty in gaining entry to private rental properties, due to cost, availability and discrimination. The Youth Coalition argues that more work needs to be done by the ACT Government in the area of housing affordability, and supporting young people to rent privately. In particular the Youth Coalition recommends a 30% increase in rent assistance for young people on Newstart Allowance or Youth Allowance.

*@youthco_act
More work must be
done to address
housing affordability,
particularly for young
people in the ACT.
#actbudget*

40% of renters who receive Commonwealth Rental Assistance (CRA) are in housing stress⁶ (defined as spending 30% of their income on rent). Housing stress for a young person means having to forego living close to shops, schools and public transport. It could also mean forgoing other items such as food. The CRA is capped at the rate of inflation, but due to extremely low vacancy rates (especially in the ACT), rents have risen much quicker than this rate. As young people are often working casually or still completing training, they struggle to compete in the private rental market.

The Youth Coalition commends the government for its measures to better the housing and homelessness service system in the ACT. However, the ability of the Government to provide “unprecedented” and “more effective” support for young people with a four million dollar budget will only be adequately tested by adopting a rigorous evaluation of the new framework, with a commitment to increase funding where need matches the evidence.

*@youthco_act
The ACT Government
must rigorously evaluate
the new youth housing
and homelessness
sector reforms.
#actbudget*

4.2 Education

The Youth Coalition supports the ACT Student Engagement Framework, being developed by the Education and Training Directorate, and its further implementation in schools, in particular the view to include both vulnerable and less vulnerable young people in a holistic strategy. It is important to target young people at risk of disengaging from education early, but also to encourage them to participate in an inclusive school community. Tiers 2 and 3 of the Student Engagement Framework focus on responding

*@youthco_act
The Youth Coalition
supports the ACT
Student Engagement
Framework and its
further implementation
in schools. #actbudget*

to disengaged students using both internal and external programs and resources.

With 1 in 5 young people experiencing a mental health issue in any given year, schools have a large role to play in building resilience in children and young people through providing safe environments that consider the differing needs of students. Issues such as school bullying continue to be a concern for many young people, particularly for young people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or intersex; young people with a disability; multicultural or newly arrived young people; and young people from a low socio-economic background. Strategies in schools need to address this, and relationships education must be a staple in everyday learning.

The Youth Coalition is also concerned about the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous educational achievement and attainment rates. In the general ACT population, the level of Year 12 or equivalent attainment was 95.2% in 2009; an increase from 90.4% in 2005. This places the ACT above the national average of 84.5% in 2009⁷. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the ACT had an attainment level of only 38.9%⁸ in 2008. The Youth Coalition recognises the positive efforts made the ACT Government to address this important issue, through the release of policies such as the 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Matters – Strategic Plan 2010-2013'.

Young people need to have a real and genuine engagement in their own educational outcomes, and be offered meaningful involvement in the school environment. This includes the active and supported participation of young people in their pathways planning, and is especially important following the introduction of the *Earn or Learn* legislation and raised school leaving age. Young people must be given the best opportunity to pursue further tertiary or vocational education through flexible and tailored guidance.

4.3 Justice

Most young people do not have contact with the criminal justice system. However, many of the young people who do have contact with this system are amongst the most vulnerable in the ACT. It is impossible to address issues of young people's involvement with the criminal justice system without also considering the social and economic factors that contribute to offending or involvement. Research has identified significant associations between offending and risk factors including: being the subject of Care and Protection orders, substance use, early school leaving age, and/or disengaging with education providers, abuse, unemployment, and parental criminal behaviour.⁹

@youthco_act
The Youth Coalition
supports a significant
investment in the
actions to be identified
in the ACT Blueprint for
Youth Justice.
#actbudget

Addressing these factors, and developing strong social policy to better respond to the needs of vulnerable young people, is the best approach the justice system in the ACT can adopt.

The Youth Coalition supports engaging with young people, wherever possible, to participate in research and consultation regarding these programs and policies, and strongly believes young people have much to offer in positively shaping these. We support a significant investment in the actions to be identified

in the 10 Year Blueprint for Youth Justice in the ACT and the consultations with young people regarding the make-up of the youth justice system in the future.

Much has been written about the impact on young people of exposure to police, courts, bail and detention. The Youth Coalition strongly supports the adoption of evidence-based and evaluated programs that seek to reduce recidivism, work towards resolution for both young offenders and young victims, and provide meaningful alternatives to detention if appropriate, such as alcohol, tobacco and other drug (ATOD) treatment services or community re-engagement programs, which may assist in addressing underlying issues of criminal behaviour.

The Youth Coalition argues that the community can continue to aim for lower detention numbers, particularly in light of the growing number of research papers that indicate detention is not a useful deterrent, and that in fact, custodial sentences can increase recidivism. Victoria, for example, after many evaluations and reforms, now has a detention rate of 0.1 per 100,000¹⁰.

Of particular contemporary concern is the issue of bail for young people charged with a crime. The Youth Coalition strongly believes that remand and detention should be considered the last resort of options for the Police and the courts¹¹.

*@youthco_act
Programs should seek
to reduce recidivism and
provide meaningful
alternatives to
detention. #actbudget*

In our submission to the *Discussion Paper: Towards a Diversionary Framework for the ACT* in April 2011, the Youth Coalition identified:

- That a properly co-ordinated response to youth justice is required, that clearly identifies the role of mainstream agencies (such as the police, schools etc) as well as specialist services (i.e. homelessness, youth support, mental health, alcohol and other drug services) in providing a spectrum of support to young people;
- That there are current examples of good practice, skills and knowledge within the government and community youth sector in the ACT which can be utilised to inform future direction;
- That we need to not only design services using an evidence base, but also contribute to the ongoing development and understanding of service system effectiveness through good evaluation of both individual programs and overall response; and,
- Young people need to be key partners and informants in design, implementation, and evaluation of the service system.¹²

This submission contained 19 recommendations, including that Justice Reinvestment models be explored, piloted and evaluated in ACT, working in conjunction with existing approaches, such as the Department of Education and Training's Re-Engaging Youth Leadership Group.

'Justice reinvestment is a criminal justice policy approach that diverts a portion of the funds spent on imprisonment to the local communities where there is a high concentration of offenders.

@youthco_act

Justice Reinvestment

models must be explored, piloted and evaluated in the ACT.

#actbudget

The money that would have been spent on imprisonment is reinvested in programs and services that address the underlying causes of crime in these communities. It is not just about tinkering around the edges of the justice system – it is about trying to prevent people from getting there in the first place.

Justice reinvestment retains detention as a measure of last resort for dangerous and serious offenders, but actively shifts the culture away from imprisonment.¹³

5. Early Intervention and Prevention

Section 5 of this submission to the 2012 – 2013 ACT Government Budget focuses on early intervention and prevention, a key whole of government and community approach to the provision of services to the ACT community.

5.1 Prevention

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

Preventing young people from facing issues such as experiencing homelessness, disengaging from education, or becoming involved in the youth justice system, are tasks that require whole of government, non-government and community approaches, that seek to address issues such as social inequality, poverty, mental health, alcohol and other drug use, family support, and care and protection concerns.

5.2 Early Intervention

The need for greater recognition and intervention with young people early in the life of any problem, as well as the life of the young person, is clearly articulated in the National Youth Strategy, 2010¹⁴. However, many ACT services report that they often do not have the capacity and resources to work with young people and their families intensively at an early stage. This includes working specifically with children and young people at risk of coming to the attention of the youth justice system, experiencing homelessness, or disengaging from education, to 'turn off the tap'. It can also be seen as support offered early in the life of problem, for example, at first point of contact with police.

Young people are not always offered support based purely on identified risk factors. Programs and services are often working with young people and their families in response to issues that could be deemed to fall into the tertiary definition.

5.3 A Whole of Government Approach to Prevention and Early Intervention

Currently the limited early intervention and prevention work and programs in the ACT are silo-ed and attached to issues such as homelessness, educational disengagement, criminal justice involvement, mental health, and substance use.

It is well recognised that child and adolescent development, and the presence of risk or protective factors are key indicators of vulnerability and potential pathways to social isolation or disadvantage.

Most of the risk factors operating in the social environment are able to be modified and therefore offer a rich field of opportunity for prevention and early intervention.¹⁵

The Youth Coalition calls on the ACT Government to resource the development of an early intervention and prevention framework that encompasses a whole of government approach to strategies and funding, and engages the broader community, including the child, youth, family support, health and education sectors.

*@youthco_act
Effective early
intervention and
prevention requires a
whole of government
approach to strategies
and funding.
#actbudget*

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