



Submission to the *ACT Government*
2013 -14 Budget

February 2013

www.youthcoalition.net

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

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

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

Submission to the *ACT Government 2013 – 14 Budget*
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February 2013

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Submission to the ACT Government 2013 -14 Budget
Youth Coalition of the ACT, February 2013

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1. Introduction

Section 1 of this submission 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 Youth Coalition of the ACT

The Youth Coalition is the peak youth affairs body in the ACT. Comprised of 100 members, programs, and individuals 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 77,000 young people residing in the ACT, representing more than 20% 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 this Submission

The Youth Coalition welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the development of the 2013 – 2014 ACT Government Budget. This submission is one of many made over a 16 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 Youth Coalition consultations on the 2013-14 ACT Government Budget;
- The issues raised through the Youth Coalition social media platforms;
- The views of participants of the Youth Coalition's Biennial Policy Forum;
- 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.

1.4 Introductory Remarks

The Youth Coalition welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the ACT Government Budget 2013 -14. In this, our centenary year, the ACT Community has the opportunity to identify priorities for ACT Government spending that work to achieve the vision of the Canberra Social Plan, that:

Canberra is a place where all people reach their potential, make a contribution and share the benefits of an inclusive community.²

Themes of connection, belonging and collaboration are articulated in the Canberra Social Plan. These are particularly important to young people in the Territory as they develop their communities and connectedness, pass through key life transitions (such as completing education or starting employment), and look to the services around them to be working together efficiently to provide much needed support.

While acknowledging the challenges of allocation of resources in the current tight fiscal environment, the Youth Coalition provides the following overview in response to the questions raised in the ACT Government Budget 2013 – 14 Discussion Paper:

What Services do you believe are most important for the Territory?

There is clear evidence that early intervention and prevention approaches make long-term financial sense, as well as have better outcomes for the community, in addressing the cost of health, well being, and social support. The Youth Coalition believes that the ACT Government has yet to strike the right balance in this, with the focus of much investment being in the tertiary, or acute, end of addressing significant issues faced by the community.

What capital infrastructure priorities should Government consider implementing in the next four years?

Young people in the ACT have consistently raised public transport and the lack of things for them to do as issues of concern.

Should Government maintain it's current suite and level of services?

It is essential to maintain the provision of services supporting young people in Canberra. Reduction or cuts to services for young people in key areas such as health, housing, education, and social support could have significant negative flow on for the community.

The foundations of belonging include government investment in services; education and employment opportunities; secure and sustainable housing; good health and wellbeing across the life course; and a collaborative and concerted effort to address disadvantage.³

How can the Government deliver current services more efficiently and productively?

The community youth sector has undergone significant change and restructure over the last two years, including the implementation of the new Child, Youth and Family Services Program; and the significant reform of youth housing and homelessness services. Much of this change has been driven by the ACT Government Agenda to deliver services more efficiently.

The Youth Coalition believes that resources for community youth services have been stretched to deliver even more, and as such any further efficiency cost savings should not be sought from these services.

Are there any services you think the community should make a direct contribution to (fee for service)?

The Youth Coalition believes that it is essential when considering fee for service that provisions are made for those experiencing economic disadvantage are not excluded from receiving services or participation in community.

This is particularly important for young people who are often recipients of lower income (apprentice wages, Government income support, age related wages structures) yet the big items affecting cost of living, such as rent, food, and utilities are not lower cost due to age.

In our consultation to inform this submission many young people raised the increase in cost of bus services as having a significant impact on them. This is even more concerning given that young people rated transport as a major barrier to participation in community in last year's *Rate Canberra* survey.⁴

Youth Coalition of the ACT Priorities for ACT Government Budget 2013 – 14

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

2. Summary of Recommendations

Section 2 provides a summary of the recommendations this submission. It is vital that these recommendations be referred to in the context of the broader submission.

Early Intervention and Prevention

Recommendation 1.
Provide leadership and resources to a whole of government and community Early Intervention and Prevention Strategy, including commitment and shared funding from all agencies.

Recommendation 2.
Explore, pilot, and evaluate Justice Reinvestment models in the ACT, with the aim to invest in addressing underlying causes of offending.

Recommendation 3.
Provide on-going investment in the delivery and evaluation of respectful relationships programs for young people in schools and other settings.

Youth Services

Recommendation 4.
Utilise the findings of the Youth Coalition and Families ACT's research regarding youth engagement, once complete, to inform the allocation of \$1.2 million to community based youth centres.

Recommendation 5.
Further invest in therapeutic services for young people.

Education

Recommendation 6.
Provide full support to the recommendations of the Gonski review including:

- Two tiered model of funding; and,
- Funding for schools to address disadvantage including students with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, low SES students and students with English as a Second Language.

Recommendation 7.
Increase support for preventative and frontline health, mental health and social support programs in schools such as the work undertaken by:

- School nurses;
- School based youth workers; and,
- Pastoral care teams.

Recommendation 8.
Improve transitional supports and education pathways for multicultural young people in the ACT, including newly arrived or refugee young people who are too young or too old to access current programs.

Recommendation 9.
Provide resources for existing and new successful programs targeting support and improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

Housing and Homelessness

Recommendation 10.
Address housing affordability, particularly for young people in the ACT.

Recommendation 11.
Undertake rigorous evaluation of youth housing and homelessness sector reforms, with a commitment to maintaining the level of current services and addressing any unmet need that arises.

Health and Wellbeing

Recommendation 12.
Provide greater training and support for frontline healthcare workers such as GP's and psychologists to target their services to young people and provide more youth-friendly practice within these services.

Recommendation 13.
Increase investment in early intervention, outreach and therapeutic mental health services for young people and their families.

Recommendation 14.
Increase mental health education provision targeting:

- Young people in schools and other locations;
- Families; and,
- Teachers.

Recommendation 15.
Support the establishment of a Sobering Up Service Trial for young people aged 16 and 17 years.

Young People and the Law

Recommendation 16.
Provide targeted funding for legal education programs directed at informing young people of their rights in order to empower them to prevent breaches.

Recommendation 17.
Continue to expand programs directed at preventing young people entering, and removing young people from, incarceration, in line with best practice.

Recommendation 18.

Provide resources to implement the key actions of the ACT Blueprint for Youth Justice 2012 - 22, particularly:

- 1.1 Develop an across agency early identification approach/framework to identify children and young people who are at risk of contact with the youth justice system;
- 3.2 Develop a Family Engagement Plan that will recognise the role of families in preventing offending and strengthen them to support their children and young people more effectively; and,
- 7.5 Partner with community sector in providing and delivering training to maximise opportunities for relationship building and partnerships.

Recommendation 19.

Undertake biannual reviews of Human Rights compliance at the Bimberi Youth Justice Centre.

Transport and Planning

Recommendation 20.

Develop Public Transport Networks to address the needs of young people, be accessible and affordable, and include adequate evening, late night and weekend services.

Recommendation 21.

Recognising the ACT Government's commitment to becoming a 'Child and Youth Friendly City', include the provision of public space and transport options which meet the needs of young people in all Canberra planning.

Workforce Development

Recommendation 22.

Invest in the youth and community sector workforce, recognising the value of multi disciplinary approaches, and the role of youth workers in engaging and supporting young people.

Recommendation 23.

That the first year funding for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Service under the CYFSP be included in the contract being developed to provide the service.

Community Sector

Recommendation 24.

Investment in and support to the community sector that recognises the change in demand for services, and addresses unmet need.

3. Early Intervention and Prevention

3.1 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 experiencing homelessness, disengaging from education, or becoming involved in the youth justice system, are tasks which require whole of government, non-government and community approaches. It is only these types of concerted approaches that can effectively address issues such as social inequality, poverty, mental health, alcohol and other drug use, family support, and care and protection concerns.

3.2 Early Intervention

The need for intervention with young people early in the life of any problem, as well as the life of the young person, is clearly articulated in the National Youth Strategy, 2010.⁵ However, many ACT services report 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 involvement with the youth justice system, experiencing homelessness, or disengaging from education. It can also be seen as support offered early in the life of a problem, for example, at the point of first contact with police.

*Young people said:
We know we have to
get really bad before
we can get the help
we need.*

Young people are not always offered support based purely on identified risk factors. These are long-term predictors that identify the likelihood that a child or young person may sooner or later engage in risky, anti-social or criminal behaviour. Risk factors may include socio-economic disadvantage, family breakdown, poor health and living conditions, intergenerational trauma, poor educational achievement and disengagement from education, sexual abuse and family violence, neglect, family drug and alcohol abuse, mental health problems, previous contact with the youth justice system, social and cultural discrimination and a history of failures – their own, their families and their support systems.⁶ Programs and services are most often responding to young people and their families to address issues at a tertiary level.

3.3 A whole of Government Approach to Prevention and Early Intervention

Currently the limited early intervention and prevention work and programs in the ACT are siloed and operate as a part of homelessness, educational disengagement, criminal justice, mental health, and substance use interventions.

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.⁷

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.

Recommendation 1.
Provide leadership and resources to a whole of government and community Early Intervention and Prevention Strategy, including commitment and shared funding from all agencies.

3.4 Justice Reinvestment

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.

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.⁸

Minister Burch, in her opening comments of the *Blueprint for Youth Justice in the ACT 2012- 22*, states *‘While this is a substantial initial investment in a constrained financial environment, the focus will be on justice reinvestment.’⁹*

The Blueprint goes on to identify that the shift is towards policies and programs that focus on addressing the underlying causes of offending by children and young people, rather than the consequences of youth crime. It focuses on developing and evaluating programs and strategies that have been proven to work in addressing the needs of children and young people, and preventing anti-social and offending behaviour among young people.¹⁰

While much discussion of Justice Reinvestment has occurred in the ACT, the Youth Coalition believes that there is still significant work to be done in the area, to both identify a common community understanding of the approach, and to actually shift resource investment into early intervention and preventative work.

Recommendation 2.
Explore, pilot, and evaluate Justice Reinvestment models in the ACT, with the aim to invest in addressing underlying causes of offending.

3.6 Respectful Relationships

Another critical area for early intervention and prevention identified by stakeholders during consultation to inform this Submission was respectful relationships programs as a key strategy to eliminate violence against women in the ACT community.

The impact of violence against women is well recognised by research and the ACT Government in *Our Responsibility, the ACT Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Strategy 2011 -17*.

Recommendation 3.
Provide on-going investment in the delivery and evaluation of respectful relationships programs for young people in schools and other settings

4. Youth Services

The Youth Coalition commends the ACT Government commitment in the Parliamentary Agreement to providing \$1.2 million in funding each year for community based youth centres. The Youth Coalition, in partnership with Families ACT, has previously called for this investment in the essential work being undertaken by community services under the Children, Youth, and Family Services Framework (CYFSP).

It is vital this funding is utilised to provide an evidence informed approach to the provision of youth engagement services, and embraces the task of engaging with young people to provide supports and linkages, and address social inclusion.

4.1 Youth Engagement

The Youth Coalition and Families ACT are currently undertaking research regarding youth engagement services. The key questions the research seeks to address are:

1. How are CYFSP service providers conceptualising and implementing youth engagement services?
2. What are the key characteristics of anchored youth centres and one-stop-shops that promote integrated service delivery for young people?
3. How can vulnerable young people shape the youth services they receive?

The research methods or components of the research project are; a literature review, case studies, mapping youth engagement approaches in the ACT, and youth consultation. The research will likely be completed by June 2013.

The first stage of the research was a literature review, which has been completed. The literature review sought to:

- Examine the rationale for integrated service delivery for young people;
- Articulate features of promising models of anchored youth services/one-stop-shops; and,
- Identify participation approaches for young people with a focus on those who are vulnerable and in need of services.

The literature review, which will be included in the final report, has highlighted that better outcomes for young people are achieved when integrated services delivery models are driven by a 'bottom up' approach, rather than 'top down'.

Further to this, the review identified a range of participation approaches, again highlighting better outcomes with services which are client/consumer driver, rather than designed in response to the needs of a funding body.

The Youth Coalition calls for a rigorous and considered approach to be taken by the ACT Government in deciding how the \$1.2 million will be allocated. This approach should consider evidence and be developed in partnership with those delivering front line services to young people in the ACT, both within and outside the CYFSP.

Recommendation 4.

Utilise the findings of the Youth Coalition and Families ACT's research regarding youth engagement, once complete, to inform the allocation of \$1.2 million to community based youth centres.

4.2 Therapeutic Services for Young People

The small number of agencies who are funded to provide therapeutic services for young people in the ACT have reported consistently that there is a significant gap between demand for these services, and availability.

Therapeutic services are an essential component of a service system that seeks to address the support needs of vulnerable young people and their families. The risk factors identified in the Early Intervention and Prevention section of this Submission describe a range of experiences and circumstances that contribute to increased vulnerability and require a therapeutic response. These include family breakdown, intergenerational trauma, sexual abuse, family violence, neglect, family drug and alcohol use, and a history of failure of support systems.

Recommendation 5.

Further invest in therapeutic services for young people.

5. Education

The Youth Coalition believes education is an area of great importance for young people. The Youth Coalition is a signatory to the ACT Youth Commitment, an expression of dedication of ACT Government Directorates, community agencies and private sector organisations to ensure the increased educational engagement, attainment and successful post school transitioning of young people in the ACT. The Youth Coalition acknowledges that the successful engagement of all young people in educational pathways involves cooperation across all facets of the ACT Community.

Education is a major investment of the ACT Government each year. This investment is important, as low education attainment rates have been linked to many negative outcomes, from mental health issues to cardiovascular disease.¹¹ Specifically, attainment of a Certificate II or lower has been linked to social exclusion in the areas of social interactions, personal safety, community and health.¹² In the shorter term non-engagement in education leaves young people vulnerable to disengagement more generally. Disengagement can create an additional cost on the community as it leads to outcomes such as youth homelessness, and involvement in the criminal justice system.

*Young people said:
we would have stayed
in school if there had
been more support &
less discrimination.*

The Youth Coalition notes the release in November 2012 of the *Interim Evaluation of the National Partnership On Youth Attainment and Transitions*. The Youth Coalition would like to highlight the findings of the *Beyond Learn or Earn* paper researched and published by the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition.¹³ This paper raises concerns about the effects of the partnership, particularly for the most vulnerable.

5.1 School Funding

The Youth Coalition believes all schools need to be appropriately funded and resourced. To this end the Youth Coalition supports the ACT Government's commitment to implementing the Gonski report's recommendations, in particular funding for students with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, low Socioeconomic Status (SES) students and students with English as a Second Language. By funding education the ACT Government can create an efficient, skilled and engaged workforce for now and into the future.

Recommendation 6.

Provide full support to the recommendations of the Gonski review including:

- Two tiered model of funding; and,
- Funding for schools to address disadvantage including students with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, low SES students and students with English as a Second Language.

5.2 Integrated Service Delivery

This topic is also discussed in the Health Section of the Youth Coalition Budget Submission.

Schools are recognised as a first to know agency regarding many aspects of young people's lives. The co-location of services such as health professionals, youth workers, social workers and psychologists within schools has the potential for more efficient and effective service delivery. Further, provision of these services within schools makes them more accessible for young people and their families. In order to

be supportive of the general health needs of young people, teaching staff require ongoing professional development to identify and respond to issues which may arise.

Recommendation 7.

Increase support for preventative and frontline health, mental health and social support programs in schools such as the work undertaken by:

- School nurses;
- School based youth workers; and,
- Pastoral care teams.

5.3 Young People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds

Education is a significant issue for young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, particularly those who are newly arrived or from a refugee background who may have experienced limited formal schooling, or gaps in their education. Services that work with young people from CALD backgrounds have highlighted the need to provide additional resources to English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. The Youth Coalition supports the continuation and expansion of services like the Dickson College Refugee Bridging Pilot Program, which assist young people aged 16 years and over who are newly arrived and of a refugee background, to complete Year 10 and 12.

Services report that young people who are under the age of 16, and who are not eligible to participate in the Dickson College Program, often experience a range of challenges in maintaining attendance at school. Young people are in particular need of additional support when making transitions between schools, including from intensive English centres to mainstream high schools. If not supported during these transitions, students risk become disengaged from education before they reach the age that they could access support.

Recommendation 8.

Improve transitional supports and education pathways for multicultural young people in the ACT, including newly arrived or refugee young people who are too young or too old to access current programs.

5.4 Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People

The Youth Coalition remains concerned that there is a significant gap in retention rates and educational attainment between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the rest of the population. The Youth Coalition has supported the work of Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation in successfully promoting the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. As noted above, those who are less engaged in education have costly outcomes for their health, employment and housing prospects. These issues are closely interlinked and such links suggest that investment in any of the associated areas means better outcomes in the other.

Recommendation 9.

Provide resources for existing and new successful programs targeting support and improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

6. Housing and Homelessness

Housing is a fundamental determinant of the wellbeing of young people and should be given extremely high importance in any government policy development. Safe and stable housing is also a basic human right. These human rights are protected by a number of international human rights treaties, in particular the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,¹⁴ the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,¹⁵ and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.¹⁶ Having ratified these treaties, Australia is under legal and moral obligations to promote, protect and realise the human rights of all people within its territory or under its control. Despite these treaties and an ACT Human Rights Charter, many young people still experience housing stress or homelessness.

6.1 Housing Affordability

The private rental market in the ACT is amongst the highest in Australia. Many young people report difficulty in gaining entry to private rental properties, due to cost, availability and discrimination.

Many young people in the ACT experience severe financial hardship associated with the high cost of living.¹⁷ As young people are often working casually or still completing training, they struggle to compete in the private rental market. In December 2012 median weekly house rentals in the ACT were \$480 per week and median weekly unit rentals were \$430 per week.¹⁸ Over the last three years rents have risen by an average of 10 per cent nationally, while the maximum rates of Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) have increased by only 2.7 per cent.¹⁹ Even if students receive Rent Assistance 43% of recipients experience housing stress because they are paying more than 30% of their income in 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. Rent assistance paid to students is subject to more restrictions and is paid at a lower rate than rent assistance pays to people on other payment types.²⁰ The CRA is capped at the rate of inflation, but due to extremely low vacancy rates (especially in the ACT), rents have risen much more quickly than the inflation rate.

The Youth Coalition recommends a 30% increase in rent assistance for young people on Newstart Allowance or Youth Allowance and a review of payments taking into account jurisdictional issues. The ACT Government is urged to lobby the Commonwealth Government on this issue and consider supplementary payments to ACT residents on CRA in severe housing stress.

In the Youth Coalition survey *Rate Canberra 2012*, 12% of respondents indicated 'paying rent, board, or mortgage repayments' was worrying them.²¹ Vulnerable young people also report they may have forgone proper nutritional meals, struggled to pay utility bills, especially in winter, and had difficulties paying rent due to the amount of income support being inadequate for their needs²².

Young people said: It's really hard to find an affordable place to live in an expensive rental market with a high student population.

The Youth Coalition argues more work needs to be done by the ACT Government in the area of housing affordability, and supporting young people to rent privately. The National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness is being re-negotiated in 2013 and the Youth Coalition urges that more funding be allocated to affordable housing initiatives for young people.

Recommendation 10.

Address housing affordability, particularly for young people in the ACT.

6.2 Homelessness

Housing support services across Australia are struggling to cope with the demand. In the ACT in 2010-2011, 59% of all people seeking immediate accommodation were turned away.²³ Young people have identified that if an initial request for housing support is unmet, this may negatively influence their decision to seek assistance in the future.²⁴ It is currently estimated that on any given night in the ACT 1,785 people are homeless.²⁵

The ACT's youth housing and homelessness service system has undergone significant reform in recent years. An independent evaluation of the new service system in the ACT is yet to be undertaken. An evaluation is required in order to learn from the reform process, identify gaps and areas of unmet need, and inform policies for the future. The evaluation should include: the cluster model of crisis accommodation which replaced the previous group housing model; and the increasing provision of supported accommodation to young people in shared units rather than single properties.

The Youth Coalition is greatly concerned about the projected withdrawal of \$5.9 million of funding from Social Housing and Homelessness Services by 2014-15. This withdrawal of funding is of particular concern in an environment where there is already significant unmet need and increasing demand. The 2009 ACT Government paper *The Road Map* indicated '*whilst the data shows the ACT is generally providing overall higher quality services and producing better client outcomes, the ACT's average costs are significantly higher*'.²⁶ This data indicates the prior investment of government in this jurisdiction has paid off with better outcomes. While the review of the current homelessness costing structure may provide a more consistent approach to funding of services, it must be expected that such a significant reduction in funding across the sector will result in a reduction in overall service provision and therefore reduced outcomes for people experiencing homelessness.

As the youth homelessness sector has already undergone significant reform, the ACT Government is urged not to consider further funding cuts in this sector in coming years as services are already stretched and unable to meet demand. Significant gaps

*Young people said:
Young people are in
refuges for a reason,
they need support. It's
not like it's fun.*

in the existing system have been identified such as a lack of services designed to work with young people experiencing high and complex needs. Many youth homelessness support services are also reporting that current funding does not adequately cover the cost of service delivery, thereby limiting capacity to deliver quality services and desired outcomes.

The ACT Government is urged to reconsider its investment in supporting people experiencing homelessness. A whole of government approach to homelessness and housing issues must be promoted, recognising the many pathways into homelessness. In an environment of low housing affordability, investment in homelessness support services is essential, as until housing affordability is effectively addressed in the ACT many people will continue to experience homelessness.

Finally, the Youth Coalition encourages the ACT Government to include an evaluation framework into upcoming reform of homelessness services. With any reform process it is essential that an evaluation framework is built in to ensure the aims of the reform are being achieved, the full cost of service delivery has been granted, and to highlight any unforeseen service gaps which may have resulted from the reform.

Recommendation 11.

Undertake rigorous evaluation of youth housing and homelessness sector reforms, with a commitment to maintaining the level of current services and addressing any unmet need that arises.

7. Health and Wellbeing

The Youth Coalition supports the World Health Organization's definition of health, as not simply the absence of disease or illness, but rather a state of 'complete physical, mental and social wellbeing'.²⁷ The Convention on the Rights of the Child also states it is the right of young people to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health.²⁸ Further, the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion lists the fundamental prerequisites for good health as peace, shelter, education, food, income, a stable ecosystem, sustainable resources, social justice and equity.²⁹ This illustrates the interconnectedness of health and other basic needs of young people.

From the ages of 12 – 25 years, young people experience many life changes that can affect their health. These include sexual, physical, mental and emotional development. In this period of their lives young people also go through key transition points in family, housing, education, employment, peers and other relationships which can affect their health. Young people require the provision of a range of healthcare services including preventative and acute.

In addition to physical health issues, young people in the ACT have reported mental health concerns, such as stress, body image and feeling sad or anxious as among their five key concerns in their life.³⁰

7.1 General Health

Consultations with youth specific health service providers and young people indicate General Practitioners (GPs) and Health Clinic staff require improved training to more effectively address the healthcare needs of young people. This is consistent with the findings and recommendations of the *ACT Healthy Young People Feasibility Study Final Report*.³¹ Additional bulk billing GPs are also required for young people, who have reported cost is prohibitive to accessing care. By providing coordinated health provision, efficiencies and savings can be made such as lost time going between services and doubling up of care provision.

*Young people said:
We need more bulk
billing doctors and
access to dentists in
Canberra.*

Recommendation 12.

Provide greater training and support for frontline healthcare workers such as GP's and psychologists to target their services to young people and provide more youth-friendly practice within these services.

7.2 Mental Health

One in four young people experience a mental health issue in any given year.³² Therefore with the population of young people aged 12-25 being more than 77 000 persons,³³ just under 20,000 young people in the ACT would benefit from mental health care and support each year. Existing services can only provide support to a fraction of this number. The costs of the cumulative ongoing impacts of not addressing mental health issues from a young age are significant. The onset of three quarters of adults suffering psychiatric disorder occurred by 24 years of age.³⁴

Youth mental healthcare providers report it is most effective to provide care when mental health issues are mild to medium. Where this care is not provided, or delayed even a few months, issues can become severe leading to the need for more costly interventions including hospitalisation.

Recommendation 13.

Increase investment in early intervention, outreach and therapeutic mental health services for young people and their families.

*Young people said:
Mental Health a big
issue, need free
services without
appointment limits,
cost is a major barrier
to help seeking.*

Mental health issues are affected by the general health of young people along with the provision of other basic needs including housing, education and income (generally through employment). If these basic needs are not met, mental health issues can become far more severe, thereby incurring increasing costs to the government for service provision. It is particularly important to address the health issues of young people as the economic impact of disabling illness is at its maximum at 22 years of age.³⁵ By addressing the health concerns of young people we can retain their productive engagement and thereby reap the greater economic benefit in addition to improved outcomes for individuals.

The concurrence of issues in education and mental health suggests schools are a good location to provide services to young people. *Co-location of healthcare providers within schools, as a first to know agency, is further discussed in the Education section of this Submission.*

Friends, family and teachers are often at the frontline of supporting young people experiencing mental health issues. 19% of young people identified mental health as an issue that is affecting their life and is worrying them, when responding to the Youth Coalition survey *Rate Canberra 2012*.³⁶ The respondents identified friends, family members and the Internet as the top three places they go to for information and support.³⁷ This suggests mental health education, such as Mental Health First Aid training or Mental Illness Education ACT (MIEACT) programs, need to be provided to these groups to help identify issues in the early stages and provide information about available services and supports. Further, young people need to be provided with support for quality help seeking behaviour.

*Young people said:
Bullying is a massive
issue. Getting picked on
at school can affect the
rest of your life.*

Recommendation 14.

Increase mental health education provision targeting:

- Young people in schools and other locations;
- Families; and,
- Teachers.

7.3 Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs: Young People Sobering Up Service

Binge drinking and alcohol-related incidents (including violence and anti-social behaviour) involving young people, particularly in Canberra's town centres, is an increasingly prominent issue for the ACT community.

While ACT Policing currently have the option to transport intoxicated people over the age of 18 years to a sobering up facility, this is not available as a response for young people under the age of 18. As such, intoxicated young people may experience

inappropriate responses, such as being detained in the Regional Watch House, and engagement with the criminal justice system.

Currently the Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug (ATOD) and Youth Sectors are engaged in discussion about what the best model for a sobering up facility for young people under the age of 18 would look like, and how the ACT Community could provide this service while addressing all risks.

The Youth Coalition supports the establishment of a trial to provide a sobering up service for young people aged 16 and 17 years, in order to further expand the options for police in dealing with intoxicated young people. A trial of this service would allow for robust evaluation to inform future direction regarding the provision of service.

Recommendation 15.

Support the establishment of a Sobering Up Service Trial for young people aged 16 and 17 years.

8. Young People and the Law

See also 'Justice Reinvestment' in the Prevention and Early Intervention section of this Submission.

The justice system and legal concerns impact on many aspects of young people's lives. While underpinning the rights and responsibilities of everyday life, many young people report feeling uninformed, poorly consulted and disempowered when it comes to engaging with or responding to criminal, civil or common law issues. Topics such as worker rights, access to legal assistance, representation, avenues of appeal and age of independence are examples. Young people are more likely to interact with the law in regard to these civil rather than criminal matters.

Most young people do not have contact with the criminal justice system, however many of those young people who do 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 which 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.³⁸

8.1 Legal Education

Young people said: We need to learn more about our rights. Young people can be taken advantage of eg in employment.

Widespread legal education empowers young people to: protect their legal rights from violation; advocate for themselves in regard to legal issues that arise in their lives; avoid behaviours and actions that have been deemed criminal; and thereby avoid coming into contact with the legal system with its associated costs.

There are currently two key providers of legal education targeted at young people in the ACT: The Youth Law Centre and the ACT Human Rights Commission. Programs include community legal education delivered in ACT high schools, colleges and youth services aiming to engage young people regarding legal matters that may concern them. The topics discussed with the Youth Law Centre include employment, youth rights, and more recently "sexting" and cyber bullying. The Youth Coalition believes these programs could be expanded to more comprehensively provide this valuable information to young people across Canberra.

Recommendation 16.

Provide targeted funding for legal education programs directed at informing young people of their rights in order to empower them to prevent breaches.

8.2 Youth Justice System

The ACT faces significant challenges in its youth justice system. The profile of young offenders indicates:

- there is an increasing rate of detention — the detention rate of young people aged 10–17 years in the ACT rose from 0.41 (per 1000 in juvenile detention on an average night) in the June quarter 2008, to 0.63 in the June quarter

2012.³⁹ This is the third highest rate of detention nationally (behind the Northern Territory and Western Australia);

- there is a high proportion of young people on remand — in the June quarter 2012 the proportion of young people on remand (unsentenced) in detention was 71% of the total number of young people in detention in the ACT;
- there are more young people being placed on community-based orders — in 2009–10 the rate of young people under community-based supervision was 6.07 (per 1000 population) compared to the national average of 4.49;
- there is an over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young offenders in detention — in 2009–10 the daily rate of detention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged 10–17 years was the third highest nationally at 595.9 per 100,000 young people. An Indigenous young person aged 10–17 years is 11 times as likely to be under community-based supervision as a non-Indigenous person aged 10–17 years and 22 times as likely to be in detention; and,
- there is an increasing rate of recidivism — the recidivism rate of sentenced young people in custody increased from 22% in 2010–11 to 29% in 2011–12, and the recidivism rate of young people on community-based orders increased from 31% in 2010–11 to 32% in 2011–12.⁴⁰

The Youth Coalition acknowledges work has started to reduce the use of detention. However, concerns remain that the continued high rate of unsentenced detainees suggests there are a number of young people incarcerated who are later found not to have committed an offence, or that their sentence should not involve incarceration.

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 reengagement programs, which may assist in addressing underlying issues of criminal behaviour.

The significant financial outlay for detention and imprisonment could be better used in programs to support young people prior to criminal engagement. Detention has immediate financial costs, but also ongoing financial impacts whereby detainees are removed from the workforce or education and thereby find it harder to gain employment or continue education upon their release. Former detainees are also more likely to require other financial supports than those who are not incarcerated.

Recommendation 17.

Continue to expand programs directed at preventing young people entering, and removing young people from, incarceration, in line with best practice.

Recommendation 18.

Provide resources to implement the key actions of the ACT Blueprint for Youth Justice 2012 - 22, particularly:

- 1.1 Develop an across agency early identification approach/framework to identify children and young people who are at risk of contact with the youth justice system;
- 3.2 Develop a Family Engagement Plan that will recognise the role of families in preventing offending and strengthen them to support their children and young people more effectively; and,
- 7.5 Partner with community sector in providing and delivering training to maximise opportunities for relationship building and partnerships.

8.3 Human Rights

The Youth Coalition welcomed both the ACT Human Rights Commission's Review of the Youth Justice System in the ACT (2011) and the development of the Blueprint for Youth Justice in the ACT 2012-22.

The Youth Coalition believes ongoing review and monitoring of human rights compliance, particularly in Bimberi Youth Justice Centre, provides valuable information about how the system could be improved and is vital in order to develop the most effective whole of government youth justice response.

Recommendation 19.

Undertake biannual reviews of Human Rights compliance at the Bimberi Youth Justice Centre.

9. Transport and Planning

9.1 Transport

The Youth Coalition recognises access to affordable, safe and timely public transport is essential to the ability to participate economically, and a key socio-economic determinant of health and wellbeing for young people. The Youth Coalition acknowledges young people are among the greatest users of public transport options in the ACT, and that transport services need to be further developed to meet the needs of young people. In the Youth Coalition survey *Rate Canberra 2012*, 60% of survey respondents aged 12 – 25 identified that the bus was one of their most common forms of transport,⁴¹ making it a vital service for young people in the ACT.

Young people require timely, reliable transport to and from activities including education, training, employment, and social inclusion activities. In consultations in 2012 and 2013, young people identified there is a need for additional evening, late night and weekend bus services. This is particularly important for young people who are more likely to be engaged in part-time employment or social inclusion activities during the evenings and weekends, or those who live in Canberra's outer suburbs.⁴² The reliability of public transport services is also of significant concern for young people. Services not showing up, or running very late, has a significant impact on young people, who may not have any alternative forms of transport available. In *Rate Canberra 2012*, 20% of young people identified they "find it really hard to get places", and young people frequently identified "I can't travel there" as a barrier to participation in social activities.⁴³ Improving public transport options would allow young people to overcome some of these transport barriers and fully participate in their community.

*Young people said:
Need more buses at night. Also, not having affordable transport makes staying in school difficult.*

Increases in the cost of public transport fares can make it even more difficult for young people to participate in their community. In our 2013 consultations, many young participants referred to the recent increase in public transport fares as presenting an additional barrier to accessing public transport services. For young people who are on very limited incomes or allowances, increasing the cost of public transport may disproportionately affect their ability to engage in education, employment or social inclusion activities.

Recommendation 20.

Develop Public Transport Networks to address the needs of young people, be accessible and affordable, and include adequate evening, late night and weekend services.

9.2 Planning

Under Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, young people have the right to rest, leisure, recreation and participation in cultural life and the arts.⁴⁴ Young people's participation in arts, sports and recreation activities is central to their health and wellbeing. In *Rate Canberra 2012*, "finding things to do in Canberra" was rated by participants as amongst their top 5 issues and concerns.⁴⁵

Public space has a particularly important significance to the lives of young people. Young people use public space for a variety of reasons, such as: to sustain friendships, to socialise, to entertain themselves, to act as an alternative to paid

events and places, to make new friends and social contacts, and to act as an escape.⁴⁶ During consultation to inform the development of this Submission, some young people raised concerns that the reduction in youth centre services in the ACT has impacted on their ability to access a 'safe place'. Additionally, young people who did not use youth centres also raised concerns that the reduction in these services had increased the presences of vulnerable young people around shopping centres, parks etc.

Young people said: With a reduction in youth centre hours – safe spaces aren't there for young people anymore.

In *Rate Canberra 2012*, young people identified walking (44%) and using a bicycle or skateboard (23%) as common forms of transport and the planning of suburbs should include walking and cycling paths to allow for active transport.⁴⁷

The Youth Coalition of the ACT Recognises and welcomes the ACT Government's commitment to building a 'Child and Youth Friendly City'.⁴⁸ When planning a child and youth friendly city, it is important that the needs and views of young people be included in all the consultation and planning process of their local public spaces. The master plans for new suburbs or regions, and the redevelopment of exiting suburbs and town centres, should include the provision of public space and active transport options which are accessible to young people.

Recommendation 21.

Recognising the ACT Government's commitment to becoming a 'Child and Youth Friendly City', include the provision of public space and transport options which meet the needs of young people in all Canberra planning.

10. Workforce Development

10.1 Youth Sector Workforce Development

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

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.

Young people said: We need long term relationships with experienced workers who treat you with respect.

The central focus of the Youth Coalition's submission to the 2012 – 2013 ACT Government Budget was workforce development for the youth and family support sector, which included issues and recommendations such as:

- Welcoming the commitment by the ACT Government to funding the outcomes of the Equal Pay Case over the next eight years;
- Strategies that address workforce capacity and resources to effectively implement change are required;
- Support the Budget Submission developed by the ACT Community Sector Leaders Forum, in particular the call for a one-off 15% investment in recognition of the growing requirements on the sector;
- 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;
- Defined career paths and improved conditions will assist in improving recruitment and retention in the youth and family support sector;
- 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;
- 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;
- The CYFSP Bus Tour Induction Project should be expanded into the 2012 / 2013 financial year, for workers in CYFSP services and related sectors;
- Adult support services will require training to work with young people aged 18 – 25 years, who will lose services with the implementation of the Child, Youth and Family Services Program; and,
- Funding for development and evaluation of best-practice resources for youth and family support services and people accessing services, must be identified.⁴⁹

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 CYFSP Workforce Development Sub-Group; and the

Practice Framework Project developed 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 which 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.

It is important to recognise, in this approach, the range of professionals working to support young people and the value of a multi disciplinary approach in the development of the youth sector workforce. Additionally, the Youth Coalition believes that for a strategic approach to workforce development for the youth sector to be most effective, it must involve both government and non-government workers. A range of agencies have recognised the value of employing workers with specific skills in engaging and supporting young people, for example many youth workers are now employed in school, youth justice, and health settings.

Recommendation 22.

Invest in the youth and community sector workforce, recognising the value of multi disciplinary approaches, and the role of youth workers in engaging and supporting young people.

10.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Service in CYFSP

The Children, Youth, and Family Services Program Service Delivery Framework identified \$143,243.10 per annum allocated towards an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Service to improve the cultural competency of services and promote the access and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, and families.

While this component of the Framework was not initially tendered for, negotiations have been underway to contract this service to the ACT Council of Social Services (ACTCOSS), who already provide similar work with other community service sectors under the Gulanga Program.

The Youth Coalition welcomes this outcomes, and as the agency delivering cultural competency development work under CYFSP in the area of multicultural young people, we look forward to working closely with ACTCOSS.

Given the lengthy delay in finalising a service funding agreement, the Youth Coalition seeks assurance that the first year funding, from March 2012, for this component of the CYFSP Framework will be included in the contract to be developed.

Recommendation 23.

That the first year funding for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Service under the CYFSP be included in the contract being developed to provide the service.

11. Community Sector

The level of change the ACT Community Sector is currently undergoing presents significant challenges in maintaining services to some of the most vulnerable members of the ACT community. These changes encompass both Australian Government driven reform, as well as reform led by the ACT Government. The Youth Coalition believes that it is essential that these processes be developed in true partnership with the range of community service providers, in particular peak bodies, which are often in a position to present a unique and broad perspective informed by both agencies and the workforce.

It is essential that all levels of the ACT Government recognise the contribution the community sector makes in the ACT, not as a provider of 'cheaper services', but as a major contributor to the ACT economy. The community sector provides important economic contributions through employment and through supporting vulnerable Canberrans to participate socially and economically in the community.

11.1 Community Sector Reform

The Youth Coalition commends the ACT Government's commitment to support pay equity, and to address 'red tape reduction' for the community sector. While administrative reforms will contribute to easing the burden for agencies, it is also important that the ACT Government supports the community sector, recognising the change in demand for services, and the struggle to address unmet need.

As such the Youth Coalition advocates:

- Investment in workforce development (*addressed in previous section*);
- Utilising cost saving reform (such as red tape reduction) to invest in support to the sector to increase service integration, continue to develop collaborative practice, and respond to client driven models of service funding;
- Reviewing models of procurement for community service delivery; and,
- Support and recognition of the ACT Social Compact at all levels of Government and community services.

Recommendation 24.

Investment in and support to the community sector that recognises the change in demand for services, and addresses unmet need.

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