



Submission to the *ACT Government*  
*2014 -15 Budget*

October 2013

[www.youthcoalition.net](http://www.youthcoalition.net)

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

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

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

Submission to the *ACT Government 2014 – 15 Budget*  
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October 2013

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

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Youth Coalition of the ACT, October 2013

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# 1. Introduction

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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. It also include the Youth Coalition's response to the questions posed in the ACT Budget 2014 – 15 consultation papers.

## 1.1 Youth Coalition of the ACT

The Youth Coalition is the peak youth affairs body in the ACT. Comprised of approximately 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.<sup>1</sup> With over one fifth of Canberra's population comprised of young people, it is important that the wellbeing of young people be regarded as an indicator of the ACT's future population health and development.

## 1.3 Process for Developing this Submission

The Youth Coalition welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the development of the 2014 – 2015 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* (updated in 2013);
- The views of participants of the Youth Coalition's Forums and Networks;
- Previous Youth Coalition submissions to the ACT Government;
- One-on-one consultations with member services and organisations; and,
- Current and topical research on youth affairs.

## 1.4 Introductory Remarks and Response to ACT Budget Consultation Questions

The Youth Coalition welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the ACT Government Budget 2014 -15.

Building upon the successes of the first 100 years of the nation's capital, 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.<sup>2</sup>*

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 2014 – 15 Discussion Paper:

### ***What services do you believe are most important for the Territory?***

The Youth Coalition has provided input to and supports the ACT Council of Social Services (ACTCOSS) budget submission and the identification that the ACT Government should invest in social infrastructure to reduce inequality and that any new initiatives should target people and communities that are most likely to drive demand for services.

The ACT Government provides or facilitates many services that support young people in the ACT. In addition services to the community in the ACT are supported by Australian Government funding, including in recent years through National Partnership Agreements. The Youth Coalition acknowledges the change of Australian Government means that at this point there is still uncertainty regarding the direction of federal funding in some key areas, and calls upon the ACT Government to be prepared and planned in terms of responding to any shortfall or significant change in funding levels in key areas of service to the community, such as education, housing, legal services, and health.

Through this submission, the Youth Coalition wishes to particularly highlight education, housing and homelessness support, and transport, as services that are vital to the well being and participation of young people in our community. Additionally the Youth Coalition continues to advocate for a whole of government, planned approach to early intervention and prevention.

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

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 infrastructure priorities should the Government consider initiating 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.

Housing affordability is one of the most significant issues facing the ACT community. To this extent the Youth Coalition also supports the ACT Shelter budget submission, which calls for a commitment to investigate the extensive development of community housing to address the gap between government and affordable housing; and, the establishment of a housing affordability taskforce.

***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 capacity and that the increase in collaboration and integration between services, while producing better outcomes, has actually increased workload for the sector. As such any further efficiency cost savings should not be sought from these services.

The Youth Coalition also acknowledges that work has started within the Community Services Directorate to better align service and policy work across different (but related) portfolios, and in particular supports initiatives that reduce siloed approaches across all of Government. It is important that this work identifies and builds upon the opportunities for programs and initiatives to clearly articulate their relationships with each other and capacity to enhance delivery, rather than a piecemeal approach to funding decisions that misses the interrelated impact that programs and initiatives across portfolios have on each other.

Again the Youth Coalition highlights the 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 also acknowledges the work undertaken by Families ACT in terms of proposing an alternative model of procurement for community services that:

- Saves on resources on the part of both government and community service organisations (CSOs);
- Efficiently identifies and mitigates funding risks;
- Is collaborative at its core;
- Emphasises the ongoing viability of CSOs;

- Encourages mature relationships between government departments and CSOs;
- Links the process back to positive outcomes for those receiving services (e.g. families, children).<sup>3</sup>

To this end we encourage the ACT Government to consider the Families ACT model of procurement in order to achieve greater efficiency and productivity.

***Are there any new ways to generate revenue and/or services you consider that 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.

For example, young people frequently raise 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.<sup>4</sup>

***Could the Government stop providing particular 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.<sup>5</sup>

Equally important is the need for specialised services. As services and programs are consolidated in the name of efficiency, it is vital that the ACT is able to retain expert service delivery for cohorts such as young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, women, and people needing support for mental health or alcohol and other drug concerns.

The Youth Coalition believes we have reached a critical point in funding of services for the most vulnerable people in our community and that any reduction in services across the ACT should be borne by the whole community not those already experiencing significant disadvantage or distress.

***Youth Coalition of the ACT Priorities for ACT Government Budget 2014 – 15***

Most laws, policies and programs produced by the ACT Government will impact in some way on young people. In response to the current budget climate, the Youth Coalition has decided to focus our comprehensive submission on the issues for young people that we believe are most at risk of funding shortfall. These are:

- Education
- Housing and Homelessness
- Transport
- Early Intervention and Prevention

Many of the issues faced by young people are also reflected in the concerns of the broader community sector. The Youth Coalition also recognises and supports the budget submissions from our partners and the ACT peaks network on issues such as health and wellbeing, alcohol and other drugs, mental health, education and training, employment, justice, social inclusion, social justice, housing and disability.

## 2. Summary of Recommendations

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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.

### Education

**Recommendation 1.**

Investigate ways to continue successful programs such as the community based Youth Connections Program and the Alternative Programs delivered by the Education and Training Directorate (Transitions and Careers).

**Recommendation 2.**

Ensure that specialist youth services and practitioners are funded to deliver supports for students who have disengaged or are at risk of disengaging from education.

**Recommendation 3.**

Invest in the resources, tools, and support necessary to facilitate schools' implementation of the Engaging Schools Framework.

**Recommendation 4.**

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 5.**

Ensure that community based specialist youth services are properly resourced to be able to engage with and provide service within schools.

**Recommendation 6.**

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 7.**

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

**Recommendation 8.**

Offset any funding cuts to Homelessness Services and commit to ensuring that services funded under the NPAH are maintained.

**Recommendation 9.**

Create youth-specific referral/intake capacity within the youth homelessness service system.

## Transport and Planning

### **Recommendation 10.**

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

### **Recommendation 11.**

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

## Early Intervention and Prevention

### **Recommendation 12.**

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. Education

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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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.

### 3.1 School Funding

Previous submissions by the Youth Coalition have called on the ACT Government to provide full support to the recommendations of the Gonski Review, 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.

The Youth Coalition applauds the ACT Government for signing on to the National Plan for School Improvement (Gonski). The Youth Coalition is supportive of the 2013 / 14 Budget initiatives to support the National Plan for School Improvement:

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

The Youth Coalition acknowledges the impact that the change of Australian Government has on the education portfolio, in particular the uncertainty that is faced with regards to the school funding reforms started by the previous Australian Government. The Youth Coalition urges the ACT Government to be proactive in the area of school funding and plan for continued school improvement beyond the Gonski Reforms.

### 3.2 National Programs and Partnerships That Are Concluding

Two major initiatives that support young people to remain engaged in education, training or employment through the current National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions are due to conclude in 2014. These are:

- Youth Connections
- Partnership Brokers

The Youth Coalition encourages the ACT Government to address the gap that these initiatives will leave if they are not picked up within the new funding model, particularly given the cessation of the Community Services Directorate program that focussed on supporting young people with statutory involvement to engage in education.

While the level of Year 12 attainment in the ACT is above the national average, youth unemployment, underemployment, labour underutilisation and rates of casual employment among young people is increasing. It is becoming increasingly important that young people entering the workforce are able to demonstrate desired employability skills. Therefore, it is vital that the ACT Government takes a leadership role in ensuring that all students are actively engaged in meaningful education, training or employment.

In particular, the ACT Government should ensure that schools fulfil their responsibility to actively engage with young people, in accordance with the young people's development stages and individual learning needs.

Students who have disengaged or are at risk of disengaging require specific, targeted support to remain in education, with a particular focus on overcoming barriers to participation and engagement. The Youth Coalition strongly believes that these services need to be delivered by practitioners and agencies who are experienced in working with vulnerable young people, as opposed to being incorporated into generalist transitions or vocational services.

**Recommendation 1.**

Investigate ways to continue successful programs such as the community based Youth Connections Program and the Alternative Programs delivered by the Education and Training Directorate (Transitions and Careers).

**Recommendation 2.**

Ensure that specialist youth services and practitioners are funded to deliver supports for students who have disengaged or are at risk of disengaging from education.

### **3.3 Engaging Schools**

The Youth Coalition recognises that schools have a responsibility to actively engage with young people, in accordance with their developmental stages and individual learning needs. To this end, the Youth Coalition welcomes the ongoing development of the ACT Government's Engaging Schools Framework.

The Youth Coalition encourages the ACT Government to invest in the resources, tools and support necessary to facilitate schools' self-assessment and change management processes. The Youth Coalition strongly recommends meaningful student and parent participation in the full range of design, planning and evaluation stages of the development and implementation of the Engaging Schools Framework.

**Recommendation 3.**

Invest in the resources, tools, and support necessary to facilitate schools' implementation of the Engaging Schools Framework.

### **3.4 Integrated Service Delivery**

Schools are recognised as a first to know agency regarding many aspects of young people's lives. The co-location or provision of outreach 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 can make them more accessible for young people and their families, particularly as schools implement the Engaging Schools Framework.

With the move to focus on school autonomy it is vitally important that community based specialist youth services are prepared and properly resourced to be able to engage with and provide service to and within schools.

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

**Recommendation 4.**

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 5.**

Ensure that community based specialist youth services are properly resourced to be able to engage with and provide service within schools.

### **3.5 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 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 6.**

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

## 4. Housing and Homelessness

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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,<sup>8</sup> the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,<sup>9</sup> and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.<sup>10</sup> 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.

### 4.1 Housing Affordability

Despite recent falls, 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.

In September 2013 median weekly house rentals in the ACT were \$463 per week and median weekly unit rentals were \$403 per week.<sup>11</sup> This amounts to a 3.6% decrease in weekly house rents and a 1.7% decrease in weekly unit rents since June 2013. However, many young people in the ACT experience severe financial hardship associated with the high cost of living.<sup>12</sup> As young people are often working casually or still completing training, they struggle to compete in the private rental market. This is amplified by rising youth unemployment, with the full-time unemployment rate for youth aged 15 – 19 years old reaching, a 15 year high, of 27.3% in June 2013.<sup>13</sup>

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. The Youth Coalition continues to recommend 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 Australian Government on this issue and consider supplementary payments to ACT residents on CRA in severe housing stress.

In the 2012 Youth Coalition survey *Rate Canberra*, 12% of respondents indicated 'paying rent, board, or mortgage repayments' was worrying them.<sup>14</sup> 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 needs.<sup>15</sup>

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 future funding for the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness is unknown and the Youth Coalition urges that more funding be allocated to affordable housing initiatives for young people.

The Youth Coalition recognises that many of the ACT's peaks bodies are raising housing in their budget submissions as a crucial issue for the particular groups they represent. The Youth Coalition supports approaches that address the barriers to

housing that specific groups in our community face including people with mental health issues, alcohol and other drug addictions and poverty. The Youth Coalition supports the creation of a housing affordability taskforce made up of government and community representatives. The Youth Coalition recommends that the taskforce include appropriate representation from the youth sector and strategies to engage with young people themselves to address the specific experience of young people in Canberra attempting to access affordable housing.

**Recommendation 7.**

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

**4.2 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.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> It is currently estimated that on any given night in the ACT 1,785 people are homeless.<sup>18</sup>

The ACT's youth housing and homelessness service system has undergone significant reform in recent years. An independent evaluation of the whole homelessness service system in the ACT is planned for 2014. The ACT Government must ensure that the evaluation includes specific analysis of the youth services changes, including: 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 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.

As the homelessness sector has already undergone significant reform, the ACT Government is urged to consider strategies to offset any further funding cuts in this sector in coming years, as services are already stretched and unable to meet demand. Significant gaps in the existing system that have been identified include 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 Youth Coalition believes that the needs of young people experiencing homelessness require a specialised youth support response from the point of initial contact. Young people report that if an initial request for housing support is unmet, they are less likely to seek assistance in the future. Youth services and stakeholders continue to report that they believe that the First Point model is not working as effectively for young people as is needed. For these reasons, the Youth Coalition recommends that specialised youth referral/intake service capacity be incorporated into the youth homelessness service system.

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.

**Recommendation 8.**

Offset any funding cuts to Homelessness Services and commit to ensuring that services funded under the NPAH are maintained.

**Recommendation 9.**

Create youth-specific referral/intake capacity within the youth homelessness service system.

## 5. Transport and Planning

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### 5.1 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 2012 Youth Coalition survey *Rate Canberra*, 60% of survey respondents aged 12 – 25 identified that the bus was one of their most common forms of transport,<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> 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*, 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.<sup>21</sup> Improving public transport options would allow young people to overcome some of these transport barriers and fully participate in their community.

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 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 10.**

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

### 5.2 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.<sup>22</sup> Young people's participation in arts, sports and recreation activities is central to their health and wellbeing. In the 2012 *Rate Canberra* survey, participants rated “finding things to do in Canberra” as amongst their top 5 issues and concerns.<sup>23</sup>

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.<sup>24</sup>

The Youth Coalition recognises and welcomes the ACT Government's commitment to building a 'Child and Youth Friendly City'.<sup>25</sup> When planning a child and youth friendly city, it is important that the needs and views of children and 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 11.**

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

## 6. Early Intervention and Prevention

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### 6.1 Prevention

Addressing the root causes of social disadvantage and vulnerability is a clear policy goal 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, requires a whole of government, non-government and community approach. Only coordinated, planned effort will effectively address issues such as social inequality, poverty, mental health, alcohol and other drug use, family support, and child protection concerns.

### 6.2 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.<sup>26</sup> 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 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.<sup>27</sup> Programs and services are most often responding to young people and their families to address issues at a tertiary level.

### 6.3 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.<sup>28</sup>

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 12.**

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

## 12. References

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