



youth coalition

of the ACT

Submission to the draft
ACT Young People's Plan 2009 - 2014

October 2009

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 draft ACT Young People's Plan 2009 - 2014
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October 2009

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1. Introduction

Section 1 of this submission provides an overview of the Youth Coalition of the ACT, and the process for developing this submission, and an introduction to young people in the ACT.

1.1 Youth Coalition of the ACT

The Youth Coalition of the ACT is the peak youth affairs body in the ACT. Comprised of 90 members, programs, and individuals the Youth Coalition is responsible for representing and promoting the interests and wellbeing of people aged between 12 and 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 as well as 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 Process for Developing and Format of this Submission

The Youth Coalition welcomes the opportunity to contribute to provide feedback on the *Draft ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014* (the draft Plan). We would like to congratulate the ACT Government on its commitment to progressing youth affairs through the development of the Plan.

This submission is a response to the *Draft ACT Young People's Plan 2009-14* and is based on the following:

- The Youth Coalition's submission to the *ACT Young People's Plan 2009-14 Discussion Paper*;
- The priority areas highlighted in the *Youth Coalition Strategic Plan 2007-10*;
- The policy positions outlined in the *Youth Coalition Policy Platform*;
- The views of participants of the Youth Coalition's Biennial Policy Forum;
- The results of the *Youth Coalition 2008 Budget Stakeholder Survey*;
- The issues raised at consultations on the 2009/10 and 2010/11 ACT Government Budget;
- *The Youth Coalition of the ACT Submission to the ACT Budget 2009/10 and ACT Budget 2010/11*;
- A stakeholder survey on the *ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 Discussion Paper* (survey);
- A stakeholder forum on the *ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 Discussion Paper* (forum);
- One-on-one consultations with member services and organisations; and,
- Current and topical research on youth affairs.

This submission has been divided into 7 sections, which include the following:

1. Introduction (this section)
2. Summary of Recommendations
3. Response to Part 1 of the Young People's Plan: Listening and Developing

4. Response to Part 2 of the Young People's: Investing in Young People
5. Response to Part 3 of the Young People's Plan: Delivering the Plan
6. Conclusion
7. References

This submission represents an opportunity for the Youth Coalition and stakeholders to identify and advise ACT Government of emerging issues, areas in need of additional resources and collaboratively develop social policy in the ACT, through comment on the *Draft ACT Young People's Plan 2009-14*.

1.3 Young People in the ACT

ACT has one of the youngest populations in Australia,¹ with the greatest proportion of people aged 15 –24 years in our total population.²

Young people contribute vitality, honesty, innovative thinking, cultural expression and critical perspectives to the communities in which we live. Communities should honour and respect these contributions. Although their voices are often unheard, young people have the right to be involved. We all have a responsibility to ensure that young people have full membership in our community. This is a matter of social justice.

Our community has a responsibility to provide the resources and opportunities that young people need in order to build their lives. As the cliché goes, young people will create the society of the future – but let us not forget they contribute to our society now. At present, the necessary resources and opportunities are not provided equitably, leaving many young people struggling to create a place for themselves in an often-hostile world. Community and government must work together to address these issues.

On the whole, young people overcome the considerable challenges they face with admirable resilience and integrity. However, young people need support and encouragement to meet these challenges.

1.4 Summary of Comments on the draft Strategy

The Youth Coalition welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Plan. We commend the commitment by the ACT Government to developing a Plan based upon community consultation and key stakeholder feedback. The significant strengths of the draft Strategy include the Human Rights Framework and that consultations were conducted with young people to identify issues.

These are important strengths of the document and the development of social policy in the ACT. In light of this, this submission has been based on how these strengths can be built upon to ensure that the Young People's Plan in the ACT is effective and meets the diverse and unique needs of all young people in the region.

This submission also identifies existing gaps in the draft Strategy, and emerging issues, that should be reflected in the Plan.

2. Summary of Recommendations

Section 2 provides a summary of the recommendations this submission makes to the further development and implementation of the Young People's Plan. It is vital that these recommendations be referred to in the context of the broader submission.

Listening and Developing

Recommendation 1

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 14 expand the third aim of the Plan to 'supporting young people to participate and engage in the further development, implementation and evaluation of the Plan'.

Recommendation 2

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 14 clearly articulate how non-government agencies will be accountable to the Plan.

Recommendation 3

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 14 clearly articulate how the ACT Government will work in partnership with young people and key stakeholders to implement the Plan.

Recommendation 4

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 14 aims include accountability mechanisms.

Recommendation 5

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 14 include one set of guiding principles:

- Rights Based
- Equity and Access
- Youth Participation and Representation
- Integration
- Early Intervention and Prevention
- Evidence Based
- Accountable

Recommendation 6

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009-2014 include definitions and clarification of key terms and concepts used in the Plan.

Recommendation 7

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 14 include a commitment to the development of an updated social and demographic profile of Young People in the ACT region.

Recommendation 8

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 14 be developed in response to comprehensive information regarding the health and wellbeing of young people, including mental health, comorbidity, sexual health, access to health services, and the range of social factors that influence the health of young people.

Recommendation 9

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 14 include information that covers a range of information on participation and access in formal decision making processes, education settings, organised activities, types of employment and participation in industry sectors, and community development activities.

Recommendation 10

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 14 include clearly defined indicators and information that measure the capacity of services working with vulnerable young people and measure the accessibility of the service sector for vulnerable people.

Recommendation 11

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 14 include a range of indicators and measurements to provide:

- Baseline data on employment, education and alternative education settings, housing and homelessness; and,
- Specific indicators and monitoring of the transitions and pathway outcomes for vulnerable young people including but not exclusive to Aboriginal and Torres strait Islander young people, young people with refugee backgrounds, young people with disability, young carers, and young people exiting detention.

Recommendation 12

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 14 clearly articulates how young people's awareness and contribution to environment and sustainability will be measured.

Recommendation 13

That the ACT Government provide feedback as to what ideas the written submissions made to the Young People's Plan Discussion Paper included and how this information was incorporated in the development of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009-2014.

Recommendation 14

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 clearly articulate:

- Its relationship with the Canberra Social Plan;
- Its relationship with the ACT Children's Plan; and,
- Opportunities where synergies will be built across other ACT Government Strategies.

Recommendation 15

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 clearly articulate opportunities where synergies will be built across other national strategies and plans.

Investing in Young People**Recommendation 16**

That all priorities of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include clearly defined progress indicators including measurement process with baseline data where available

Recommendation 17

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include clearly defined synergies with the ACT Children's Plan 2009 – 14.

Recommendation 18

That the priorities of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include housing and homelessness as a stand alone key priority.

Recommendation 19

That the priorities of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include education, employment and training as a stand alone key priority.

Recommendation 20

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include goals, strategies and progress indicators relating to Justice in one of the priority areas.

Recommendation 21

That the priorities of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include goals, strategies and progress indicators relating to a Quality Service System in one of the priority areas

*Health, Wellbeing and Support***Recommendation 22**

That Priority 1 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include a comprehensive overview of health issues for young people, including alcohol and other drugs, mental health, comorbidity, sexual health, primary health and access to health services.

Recommendation 23

That Priority 1 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include an additional goal relating to mapping and addressing existing systemic gaps for young people within the health service system.

Recommendation 24

That Priority 1 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include **new** strategies and initiatives relating to improving the health and wellbeing of young people in the ACT; including strategies to address systemic issues relating to barriers to health services for young people.

Recommendation 25

That Priority 1 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include specific progress indicators related to alcohol and other drugs, mental health, comorbidity, sexual health, primary health and access to health services for young people.

Recommendation 26

That Priority 2 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include a comprehensive overview of the barriers young people experience in participating and contributing to their families and communities.

Families and Communities

Recommendation 27

That Priority 2 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 rephrase Goal 3 to 'support' young people to participate, rather than 'encourage' young people to participate.

Recommendation 28

That Priority 2 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include **new** strategies and initiatives relating to improving young people's connections with families and communities, including referring to the Youth Services Program and strategies to address barriers to young people's participation in the community.

Recommendation 29

That Priority 2 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include specific progress indicators relating to young people's connections with families, and towards supporting young people to participate in the community.

Participation and Access

Recommendation 30

That Priority 3 of the ACT Young People's Plan include a comprehensive overview of access and participation including: education; training and employment; volunteering; fundraising; sport; recreation; culture; arts; policy and planning; and support services.

Recommendation 31

That Priority 3 the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 clearly define participation in priority 3 to include full participation and citizenship; not merely education and employment participation requirements.

Recommendation 32

That the second Goal in Priority 3 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 be rephrased to ensure young people are supported to participate.

Recommendation 33

That Priority 3 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include **new** strategies and initiatives relating to improving young people experiencing barriers to access and participation, including consultation with young people.

Recommendation 34

That Priority 3 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include specific and measurable progress indicators relating to young people's access and participation.

Recommendation 35

That Priority 3 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include specific and measurable progress indicators on young people's rights including measurement of process, rights in the community, maintenance of rights, and access to services and support.

Transitions and Pathways

Recommendation 36

That Priority 4 of the ACT Young People's Plan include a comprehensive overview of transitions and pathways including:

- Education: High school to college, college to tertiary study;
- Employment: Leaving school to work, working part time to working full time, earning an income;
- Developmental stages: mental, emotional, physical, sexual transitions;
- Transitions in personal relationships (friends, family, partners);
- Independence: Income, healthcare, living skills; and,
- Transitions for specific groups of young people, for example: young parents, young carers, newly arrived or refugee young people, alcohol and other drug use, disabled young people, young people in the justice system, young people in care.

Recommendation 37

That Priority 4 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include **new** strategies and initiatives relating to improving pathways and transitions for young people.

Recommendation 38

That Priority 4 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include specific and measurable progress indicators relating to young people's transitions and pathways.

Environment and Sustainability

Recommendation 39

That Priority 5 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include a comprehensive overview of the barriers young people experience in relation to participating and contributing to the environment and sustainability.

Recommendation 40

That Priority 5 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 rephrase Goal 2 to include 'supporting young people to take these measures.'

Recommendation 41

That Priority 5 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include **new** strategies and initiatives relating to improving young people's participation and contribution to environment and sustainability issues and increased support for young people in relation to sustainability.

Recommendation 42

That Priority 5 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include specific progress indicators relating to young people's participation and contribution to environment and sustainability issues and increased support for young people in relation to sustainability.

Delivering the Plan

Recommendation 43

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include more information on the Children and Young People Taskforce, including its aim and objectives; and a membership list.

Recommendation 44

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 expand the role of the Community Advisory Group for young people to ensure that a key objective of the group is to contribute to the development of Annual Action Plans, evaluation and review mechanisms, and planning for the Young People's Plan in 2015.

Recommendation 45

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include an evaluation framework.

Recommendation 46

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 develop an Annual Action Plan for 2010 for release in January 2010, to ensure implementation can begin in a timely manner.

Recommendation 47

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include a timeframe that outlines when each Annual Action Plan will be developed (with input from the Community Advisory Group) and made available, prior to its implementation period.

Recommendation 48

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include a timeframe and workplan by which to develop the following Young People's Plan in 2015 (which includes the development of a new Social and Demographic Profile of Young People in the ACT, by 2015).

3. Listening and Developing

Section 3 of this submission outlines the Youth Coalition's response to *Part 1: Listening and Developing* in the Young People's Plan.

3.1 Vision, Aims, Principles and Definitions

The Youth Coalition supports the ACT Government's vision that the ACT '*become a place where all people reach their potential, make a contribution and share the benefits of our community*', as expressed in the Canberra Social Plan, and further the notion that the Social Plan is an expression that captures the Government's commitment to the principles of access, equity and participation, and it's belief that we must:

- *Value and invest in our people as the ACT's most precious asset;*
- *Ensure that every citizen has a decent standard of living; and,*
- *Safeguard the freedoms necessary to allow all to live a life of dignity and value.*³

It is important that the Plan is also developed with close reference to the Canberra Social Plan and that the role, purpose and vision of the Plan are clearly articulated.

3.1.1 Vision

The Youth Coalition supports the draft Young People's Plan 2009-2014 vision that:

*'Canberra is a child and youth friendly city that supports all young people to reach their full potential, make valuable contributions and share the benefits of our community'*⁴

3.1.2 Aims

The Youth Coalition generally supports the aims statement of the draft Plan to:

- *Value and promote the positive contribution that young people make to the ACT community;*
- *Respect, protect and advance the human rights of young people in the ACT;*
- *Ensure participation and engagement by young people in the implementation of the Plan;*
- *Identify the needs of young people in the ACT and provide priorities for action by government and non-government agencies; and*
- *Guide policy development and service delivery for young people in the ACT by government and non-government agencies.*⁵

In line with the Youth Coalition's vision we commend the ACT Government on actively promoting the human rights, wellbeing and aspirations of young people in the ACT community through the Plan.

However we believe that 'ensuring participation and engagement by young people in the implementation of the Plan' should also be an underpinning principle of the Plan, rather than only an aim, and should be expanded to: 'supporting young people to participate and engage in the further development, implementation, and evaluation of the Plan'.

Recommendation 1

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009-2014 expand the third aim of the Plan to 'supporting young people to participate and engage in the further development, implementation and evaluation of the Plan'.

The Youth Coalition also calls for the Plan to clearly articulate how non-government agencies will be accountable to the Plan (as they are named in the aims of the draft Plan). Currently, the only mechanism of accountability for non-government agencies to the Plan is in the event of them receiving ACT Government funding, and being accountable through the contracting process. It is important to recognise and clarify this in the Plan.

Recommendation 2

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009-2014 clearly articulate how non-government agencies will be accountable to the Plan.

The Plan is a statement of commitment by the ACT Government to work in partnership with young people and key stakeholders to improve outcomes for young people in the ACT aged 12 – 25 years.⁶ As such, it is essential that the ACT Government clearly articulate how 'working in partnership with young people and key stakeholders' will be implemented.

Recommendation 3

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009-2014 clearly articulate how the ACT Government will work in partnership with young people and key stakeholders to implement the Plan.

The Youth Coalition also believes that strong accountability mechanisms should be included as an aim of the Plan.

Recommendation 4

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009-2014 aims include accountability mechanisms.

3.1.3 Guiding Principles

The Youth Coalition commends the ACT Government for including guiding principles in the draft Plan, in particular:

- *Young people's human rights are respected, protected and advanced in accordance with the Human Rights Act 2004 and international human rights standards such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child;*
- *Young people are provided with equitable access to information and services to meet their needs and achieve their potential.⁷*

In order for all of the guiding principles to be of most value however, they need to be more than aspirational statements. The Youth Coalition believes that young people require more than encouragement in order to fully participate in all aspects of life, and that the right to supports and access are fundamental.

The Youth Coalition believes that having a set of principles guiding the ACT Government to improve outcomes for young people in the ACT and separate principles guiding the Plan is confusing and calls for the Plan to be underpinned by a clear set of principles.

The Youth Coalition calls for the following principles to underpin the Young People's Plan 2009-2014:

- Rights Based;
- Equity and Access;
- Youth Participation and Representation;
- Integration;
- Early Intervention and Prevention;
- Evidence Based; and,
- Accountable.⁸

Recommendation 5

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009-2014 include one set of guiding principles:

- Rights Based;
- Equity and Access;
- Youth Participation and Representation;
- Integration;
- Early Intervention and Prevention;
- Evidence Based; and,
- Accountable.

3.1.4 Definitions

The Youth Coalition is concerned that the draft Plan does not provide a clear picture as to the meaning behind some of the key concepts it is using, and calls for clarification of and consistency in how these concepts are being defined.

Examples include:

- *Health and Wellbeing* – The definition of health and wellbeing needs to be holistic and include determinants;
- *Participation* – This needs to include specific reference to social and economic participation;
- *Access* – Access in the context of the Young People's Plan needs to be more than access to information and knowing and include access to services and resources;
- *Vulnerable* – Given the current work that the DHCS is undertaking in developing a proposed 'Working With Vulnerable People Checking System' the ACT Government needs to ensure it is consistent in its definition of 'vulnerable;'
- *Transitions* – this term is used to describe such a wide range of things in the draft Plan, it may be more useful to break the definitions into more detail; and,
- *Young people with specific needs* – needs clarification.

Recommendation 6

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009-2014 include definitions and clarification of key terms and concepts used in the Plan.

3.2 Profile and Data

'Evidence Based Policy Development' has been defined as being 'based upon research that has undergone some form of quality assurance and scrutiny.'⁹ It is crucial that the ACT Government is committed to 'evidence based' policy development. Governments are expected to develop policies, programs and projects based on clear evidence that links accurate information and rigorous analysis to

proposed actions. While consultation, values and opinions are important, the demands for greater public accountability for resources, new and competing sources of research and knowledge both within and outside government, and an increasingly educated society, makes the need for evidence based policy and program development essential and urgent.

It can be challenging to develop evidence-based policy when there are clear gaps in the information. This is why the Youth Coalition has been calling for the development of an updated social and demographic profile of young people to be a priority action for the newly appointed Demographer in the ACT, as announced in the 2008/2009 ACT Budget. The previous profile, *Youth in the ACT: A Social and Demographic Profile* was released in 2002, primarily using now out of date data from 1996.

This information would assist the ACT Government in its development of key policy documents, including the Plan, over the coming years and support agencies to develop evidence based policy and programs.

Relevant and updated demographic analyses and population forecasting are crucial to inform the ACT Government and youth services about the changing nature of Canberra's young people, and help agencies efficiently plan and deliver infrastructure and services to young people and their families.

While we acknowledge that the draft Plan has been based upon some key resources and publications, we are concerned that the evidence base has not been adequately consulted. The Youth Coalition believes that the evidence base used for the draft Plan does not provide a true reflection of young people and the needs of young people in the ACT region. For example, the document does not contain a literature review, the sources that the demographic data is based upon are limited and the use of this evidence is sparse throughout the draft Plan. Although the document reflects community consultation, quotes a few findings from the Mission Australia Survey and utilises a number of reports from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, this is not sufficient upon which to base five years of ACT youth policy.

Therefore, the Youth Coalition calls for a new profile to be developed to ensure that the ACT Government and community sector is able to use the best possible data when making decisions about policy and service provision to young people in the ACT.

It is also important that the Plan build in mechanisms by which to collect and analyse evidence relating to young people in the ACT; to ensure that all future strategies, plans and programs (including the Young People's Plan in 2015) builds on an up-to-date profile for young people.

Please refer to Attachment A of the Youth Coalition's *Submission to the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 Discussion Paper* for a list of other documents and organisations the ACT Government should consider in supporting the Young People's Plan.

Recommendation 7

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009-2014 include a commitment to the development of an updated social and demographic profile of Young People in the ACT region.

3.2.1 Health and Wellbeing

The Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of indicators that relate to the health and wellbeing of young people in the ACT. However, we are concerned that the information provided in this section is limited and does not provide a comprehensive picture of the health and wellbeing of young people in the ACT.

While young people's preference for skim or low-fat milk may influence their health and wellbeing, the Youth Coalition advocates for the Plan to be developed in response to comprehensive information regarding the health and wellbeing of young people, such as mental health, comorbidity, sexual health and access to health services.

The Plan should also highlight that the health and wellbeing of young people is influenced by a range of social factors, including: social exclusion and supports, employment, education, accommodation, and family circumstances. Please see Section 5.3.1 of the Youth Coalition's *Submission to the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 Discussion Paper* for more information.

Recommendation 8

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009-2014 be developed in response to comprehensive information regarding the health and wellbeing of young people, including mental health, comorbidity, sexual health, access to health services, and the range of social factors that influence the health of young people.

3.2.2 Families and Communities

The Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of indicators that relate to positive families and communities for young people in the ACT. The inclusion of the ACT Population Projections Data will support the ACT Government to identify priorities and target regions.

Housing and homelessness is a key issue for young people in the ACT, and as such, the Youth Coalition believes it warrants being a key priority in the Plan, rather than absorbed into other priorities, such as Families and Communities (see Section 4.1 for more information).

3.2.3 Participation and Access

The Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of indicators that relate to the access and participation of young people in the ACT. However, we are concerned that the information provided in this section is limited and does not provide a comprehensive picture of the access and participation of young people in the ACT.

Whilst access to the Internet and the contribution young people make through volunteering are both important aspects of access and participation, the Youth Coalition calls for information that covers a range of access and participation issues that may be perceived of more importance, such as participation and access to a range of formal decision making processes, education settings, organised activities, types of employment and participation in industry sectors, and community development activities.

The Youth Coalition emphasises that participation and access includes full participation in society and not merely employment or education participation requirements and calls for the Plan to reflect the broad nature of participation.

Access also includes the principle of equity and calls for the Plan to clearly define indicators, measure the capacity of services working with vulnerable young people and measure the accessibility of the service sector for vulnerable young people.

Recommendation 9

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 14 include information that covers a range of information on participation and access in formal decision making processes, education settings, organised activities, types of employment and participation in industry sectors, and community development activities.

Recommendation 10

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 14 include clearly defined indicators and information that measure the capacity of services working with vulnerable young people and measure the accessibility of the service sector for vulnerable people.

3.2.4 Transitions and Pathways

The Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of indicators that relate to transitions and pathways experienced by young people in the ACT. However, we are concerned that the information provided in this section is limited and does not provide a comprehensive picture of the transitions and pathways of young people in the ACT.

Whilst the data provided on education and employment transitions provides some clarity on priority transition areas, the Youth Coalition calls for information that covers a range of transitional and pathway issues that are highlighted in the draft plan in the introduction to Priority 4 and in the Youth Coalition's *Submission to the ACT Young People's Plan 2009-14 Discussion Paper*¹⁰. The Youth Coalition calls for a range of indicators and measurements to provide baseline data on employment, education and alternative education settings, housing and homelessness and specific indicators and monitoring of the transitions and pathway outcomes for vulnerable young people including but not exclusive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, young people with refugee backgrounds, young people with disability, young carers, and young people exiting from detention.

Recommendation 11

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 14 include a range of indicators and measurements to provide:

- Baseline data on employment, education and alternative education settings, housing and homelessness; and,
- Specific indicators and monitoring of the transitions and pathway outcomes for vulnerable young people including but not exclusive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, young people with refugee backgrounds, young people with disability, young carers, and young people exiting detention.

3.2.5 Environment and Sustainability

The Youth Coalition recognises the importance of the environment and sustainability to young people in the ACT and inclusion of indicators that relate to the environment and sustainability in the draft Plan. However, the Youth Coalition is challenged by the indicators in this section, as identified by the ACT Government and that the information provided in this section is limited and does not provide a comprehensive picture of environment and sustainability issues of young people in the ACT.

Whilst increasing awareness, knowledge of and participation in environment and sustainability issues is important, it is a weak indicator of progress in the context of young people in the ACT. Further to this, the Youth Coalition urges the ACT Government to articulate how the views of young people will be incorporated into Government and non-government policy and is concerned that the only avenue for this will be through the Youth Advisory Council.

Recommendation 12

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 14 clearly articulates how young people's awareness and contribution to environment and sustainability will be measured.

3.3 Participation

The Youth Coalition commends the ACT Government in using the findings of a number of surveys and consultations to inform the development of the draft Plan.

It is important to recognise that the survey tools used represent specific age and other demographic groupings of young people in the ACT, and that in order to best inform the development of the draft Plan, contributions from a wide range of stakeholders must be sought and valued.

The Youth Coalition notes that the information provided to the ACT Government through the submissions to the Young People's Plan Discussion Paper process has not been included in the background to the draft Plan. The Youth Coalition is concerned that the information provided in these submissions, which represents input from a large number of agencies and services working with young people in the ACT is not represented or valued in the draft Plan.

Recommendation 13

That the ACT Government provide feedback as to what ideas the written submissions made to the Young People's Plan Discussion Paper included and how this information was incorporated in the development of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009-2014.

3.4 Policy Context

Section 3.4 of this submission seeks to respond to the policy context as outlined in the draft Plan on pages 26 – 31.

3.4.1 ACT Legislative Context

The Youth Coalition commends the ACT Government for clearly articulating the ACT Legislative context in the draft Plan.

3.4.2 ACT Policy Context

The Youth Coalition commends the ACT Government for including an ACT Policy Context in the draft Plan, but call for it to clearly outline its relationship to the Canberra Social Plan.

Although the draft Plan provides a succinct overview of the ACT Children's Plan, it is still unclear how the ACT Children's Plan and the Young People's Plan specifically relate to each other. Although the draft Plan states that the two plans share synergies in the vision, principles and key strategies, the Youth Coalition finds that these do not currently match.

However, the Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of the building blocks of a 'child-friendly city' and look forward to seeing how these will be implemented throughout the life of the Plan.

While the overview of key strategies and plans, outlined in Appendix 3 of the draft Plan is useful, the draft Plan does not clearly outline the opportunities where synergies will be built across each strategy.

Recommendation 14

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 clearly articulate:

- Its relationship with the Canberra Social Plan;
- Its relationship with the ACT Children's Plan; and,
- Opportunities where synergies will be built across other ACT Government Strategies.

3.4.3 Australian Government Policy Context

While the overview of key national strategies and plans, outlined in Appendix 4 of the draft Plan is useful, the draft Plan does not clearly outline the opportunities where synergies will be built across each strategy.

Recommendation 15

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 clearly articulate opportunities where synergies will be built across other national strategies and plans.

4. Investing in Young People

Section 4 of this submission outlines the Youth Coalition's response to *Part 2: Investing in Young People* in the draft Young People's Plan.

4.1 Structure and Priorities

The Youth Coalition commends the general structure of the draft Plan and welcomes the identification of key priorities and clear structure within each key priority including: profiles and demographic data; goals; strategies; and progress indicators. However, we consider there to be opportunity for considerable improvement in the development of the Plan's structure.

Several key areas are underemphasised in the draft Plan due to the broadness of the key priorities. The Youth Coalition calls for more meaningful key priorities including housing and homelessness as well as education; employment and training to be stand alone key priorities in the Plan.

The Youth Coalition is concerned by the seeming incongruence across profiles, goals, strategies and progress indicators within each key priority. We highlight the need for congruent and clearly defined links between profiles, goals, strategies and indicators if the Plan is to be meaningful.

The identification of progress indicators is undermined by the aspirational, broad, non-specific and immeasurable nature of the identified progress indicators. The Youth Coalition believes progress indicators should be clearly defined including the measurement process with baseline data where available.

Recommendation 16

That all priorities of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include clearly defined progress indicators including measurement process with baseline data where available

The Youth Coalition recognises the opportunity to generate positive outcomes by creating and ensuring synergies between the Plan and the ACT Children's Plan 2009-14. The Youth Coalition believes that synergies are more meaningful than merely both plans including unrelated progress indicators. The Youth Coalition calls for the Plan to clearly define and utilise synergies between the Plan and the ACT Children's Plan 2004 - 14 through the adaptation of the draft Plan's structure and principles.

Recommendation 17

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include clearly defined synergies with the ACT Children's Plan 2009 – 2014 .

4.1.1 Gaps in the draft Plan's Priorities

This submission also identifies existing gaps in the draft Plan, which the Youth Coalition believes needs to be appropriately reflected in the Plan. The Youth Coalition calls for the Plan to develop separate key priorities for:

- Housing and Homelessness;
- Education and Employment;
- Justice; and

- A Quality Service System.

Housing and Homelessness

The right to adequate housing prescribed in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights¹¹ and recognised by article 11(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which Australia is party to,¹² aligns with the need for appropriate, stable, affordable and safe housing options for young people – which remains one of the highest priorities for young people in the ACT.

Secure housing is a fundamental determinant of the wellbeing of young people and is a crucial element to attain an 'adequate standard of living',¹³ it should be given extremely high importance in any government policy development. Weaving the issues of housing and homelessness loosely throughout the other priorities does not provide a solid framework for addressing these issues. It is vital that the Plan has a separate priority that focuses on Housing and Homelessness. For more information, please refer to Section 5.3.2 of the Youth Coalitions Submission to the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 14 Discussion Paper.

Recommendation 18

That the priorities of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include housing and homelessness as a stand alone key priority.

Education and Employment and Training

The Canberra Social Plan identifies increasing educational participation, improving transitions and workforce opportunities as goals.¹⁴ Education provides pathways for young people to explore and build their capacity through academic achievement and skill development that may enable social development, community participation and economic outcomes for individuals and the community as a whole.

Young people's access to education significantly impacts on their lives and the lives of their families. The Youth Coalition believes that in accordance with Article 13 of the ICESCR¹⁵, accessible, affordable and high quality education is a right to be enjoyed by all members of Australian society.

Employment in Australian society has significant cultural and economic importance and as such, young people require access to decent employment in order to achieve individual autonomy, social connection, and a reasonable standard of living.

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), employment is relevant to and must not be harmful to a young person's physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. The International Labour Organisation defines decent work as that which is 'productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organise and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.'¹⁶

It is vital that the Plan has a separate priority that focuses on education and employment. For more information, please refer to Section 5.3.3 and Section 5.3.4 of the Youth Coalitions Submission to the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 14 Discussion Paper.

Recommendation 19

That the priorities of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include education, employment and training as a stand alone key priority.

Justice

The ACT Government is committed to assisting children and young people to maximise their potential, within positive and supportive environments, to become valued members of the community by enhancing meaningful opportunities for rehabilitation balanced with community safety.¹⁷

Youth justice encompasses not only the experiences of young people "in trouble" with the law and the circumstances surrounding these experiences, but also young people's rights in areas such as tenancy, care and protection, industrial relations and consumer law.

The Youth Coalition believes that there are a number of key areas that require attention in relation to young people and justice, including but not limited to:

- Young people's increased risk of being victims of crime;
- Alternative options in the juvenile justice system;
- Early intervention and prevention;
- Human rights;
- Throughcare; and,
- Transitions out of detention.

The Youth Coalition urges the ACT Government to include goals, strategies and progress indicators relating to Justice in one of the priority areas. For more information, please refer to Section 5.3.5 of the Youth Coalitions *Submission to the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 14 Discussion Paper*.

Recommendation 20

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include goals, strategies and progress indicators relating to Justice in one of the priority areas.

A Quality Service System

Youth services in the ACT play a critical role in many young peoples lives by ensuring that young people, particularly young people experiencing disadvantage, have access to resources and are supported to contribute to the economic, social and political life in the ACT.

It is critical that the provision of youth services in the ACT has both a policy context and an evidence base in order to meet the current and emerging needs of young people. Relevant and updated demographic analyses and population forecasting are crucial to inform the ACT Government and youth services about the changing nature of Canberra's youth population, and help agencies efficiently plan and deliver infrastructure and services to young people and their families.

Viability of youth services and development of the youth sector is important, to ensure that the service system is set up to support young people, able to further develop to address emerging issues and provide targeted support to young people. Workforce development is a holistic, evidence-based approach that the Youth Coalition and many stakeholders have agreed is a highly valuable concept as effective sector development is rarely confined to addressing one of the elements in isolation. Sector

development interventions need to be designed with an awareness of all the forces that operate within systems to facilitate or inhibit the changes that are desired, and should address as many of these as possible in a comprehensive fashion.¹⁸

It is vital that the Plan include goals, strategies and progress indicators relating to a quality service system in one of the priority areas. For more information, please refer to Section 5.3.5 of the Youth Coalition's *Submission to the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 14 Discussion Paper*.

Recommendation 21

That the priorities of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include goals, strategies and progress indicators relating to a Quality Service System in one of the priority areas

4.2 Priority 1: Health, Wellbeing and Support

The Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of Health, Wellbeing and Support as a key priority for the Young People's Plan.

4.2.1 Introduction

While the Youth Coalition is pleased that the draft Plan includes introductory information relating to the health and wellbeing of young people in the ACT, we find this information to be limited, and believe it does not provide a comprehensive picture of the health and wellbeing of young people in the ACT.

The Youth Coalition calls for the Plan to provide a comprehensive overview of the most prominent health issues for young people, including alcohol and other drugs, mental health, comorbidity, sexual health, primary health, and access to health services.

This section of the Plan also does not highlight that the health and wellbeing of young people is influenced by a range of social factors, including: social exclusion and supports, employment, education, accommodation, and family circumstances. Please see Section 5.3.1 of the Youth Coalition's *Submission to the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 Discussion Paper* for more information.

Recommendation 22

That Priority 1 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include a comprehensive overview of health issues for young people, including alcohol and other drugs, mental health, comorbidity, sexual health, primary health and access to health services.

4.2.2 Goals

The Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of goals relating to improving young people's health and wellbeing in the draft Plan. However, we are concerned that the goals specified in the draft Plan do not recognise the range of social factors that contribute to young people's health and wellbeing.

The goals also do not recognise that many barriers to good health, wellbeing and support for young people relate to systemic issues; rather than individual issues experienced by young people; such as accessibility and affordability of health services. Therefore, the Youth Coalition believes the Plan should include an

additional goal relating to mapping and addressing existing gaps in the health service system for young people.

Recommendation 23

That Priority 1 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include an additional goal relating to mapping and addressing existing systemic gaps for young people within the health service system.

4.2.3 Strategies

While the Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of key strategies in the draft Plan (as outlined in Appendix 6 of the draft Plan), it is unclear whether these strategies are intended to be for the life of the Plan, or only for 2009.

Where other ACT Government Strategies are referred to as strategies to address specific goals (for example, the *Framework for Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing in the ACT*; under *Support young people to develop healthy lifestyles*), the specific actions within those Strategies should be included. Currently, this priority does not include any new strategies or initiatives relating to the health and wellbeing of young people in the ACT that have not been previously announced, or are not part of other ACT Government strategies.

The Youth Coalition is concerned that some strategies are targeted at children under 12 years of age, which is not appropriate for inclusion in the Plan.

The Youth Coalition also calls for the Plan to include specific strategies to support young people to identify and access existing health services. The Plan should also include strategies that seek to address systemic issues relating to barriers to health services for young people.

Recommendation 24

That Priority 1 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include **new** strategies and initiatives relating to improving the health and wellbeing of young people in the ACT; including strategies to address systemic issues relating to barriers to health services for young people.

4.2.4 Progress Indicators

While the Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of progress indicators relating to the health and wellbeing of young people in the ACT, we find that those included in the draft Plan are limited. This priority should include specific progress indicators related to alcohol and other drugs, mental health, comorbidity, sexual health, and primary health. It should also include a progress indicator related to identifying systemic barriers in the health service system, and to support provided to young people (e.g. through the provision of health services). Each of the progress indicators should include information on how they will be measured.

Additional progress indicators could include:

- Reduced harm from alcohol and other drug use in young people;
- Improved mental health outcomes in young people;
- Improved comorbidity outcomes in young people;
- Improved sexual health outcomes in young people;
- Increased health services and supports provided to young people; and,
- Improved accessibility and affordability of health services to young people.

Recommendation 25

That Priority 1 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include specific progress indicators related to alcohol and other drugs, mental health, comorbidity, sexual health, primary health and access to health services for young people.

4.3 Priority 2: Families and Communities

The Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of Families and Communities as a key priority for the Young People's Plan.

4.3.1 Introduction

While the Youth Coalition is pleased that the draft Plan includes introductory information relating to the families and communities of young people, we believe that housing and homelessness is such a prominent issue for young people that it warrants being a stand-alone key priority in the Plan. (See Section 4.1 for more information).

The Youth Coalition believes that this section of the Plan should provide an overview of the barriers young people experience in participating and contributing to their families and communities. Please see Section 5.3.7 of the Youth Coalition's *Submission to the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 Discussion Paper* for more information.

Recommendation 26

That Priority 2 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include a comprehensive overview of the barriers young people experience in participating and contributing to their families and communities.

4.3.2 Goals

The Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of goals relating to building positive families and communities.

Housing and homelessness is a key issue for young people in the ACT, and because of this, the Youth Coalition believes it warrants being a key priority in the Plan; rather than absorbed into existing priorities, such as Families and Communities. (See Section 4.1 for more information).

In relation to the third goal under this priority, *encourage young people to participate in and contribute to their communities*, the Youth Coalition believes this should be rephrased to look at 'supporting' young people, rather than 'encouraging'. The evidence base indicates that young people are interested in participating, and contributing, but experience specific barriers and require targeted supports.

Recommendation 27

That Priority 2 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 rephrase Goal 3 to 'support' young people to participate, rather than 'encourage' young people to participate.

4.3.3 Strategies

While the Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of key strategies in the draft Plan (as outlined in Appendix 6), it is unclear whether these strategies are intended to be for the life of the Plan, or only for 2009.

Where other ACT Government Strategies are referred to as strategies to address specific goals (for example, the *ACT Government Policy Framework for Children and Young People with a Disability and their Families*, under *support young people to foster positive relationships with family and significant others*), the specific actions within those Strategies should be included. Currently, this priority only includes one new strategy relating to positive families and communities of young people in the ACT (UNICEF Child-Friendly City Initiative) that have not been previously announced, or are not part of other ACT Government strategies.

The Youth Coalition also calls for the Plan to refer to the Youth Services Program; and seek to address barriers to young people's participation in the community.

Recommendation 28

That Priority 2 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include **new** strategies and initiatives relating to improving young people's connections with families and communities, including referring to the Youth Services Program and strategies to address barriers to young people's participation in the community.

4.3.4 Progress Indicators

While the Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of progress indicators relating to families and communities of young people in the ACT, we find that those included in the draft Plan are limited. This priority should include specific progress indicators relating to young people's connections with families; and also around support provided to young people (e.g. through the provision of youth services).

Additional progress indicators could include:

- Increased satisfaction among young people regarding connections with their families and communities;
- Increased accessibility and affordability of community services and activities for young people;
- Increased accessibility and use of public transport in the ACT; and,
- Increased mechanisms to support young people to participate and contribute in their communities.

Recommendation 29

That Priority 2 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include specific progress indicators relating to young people's connections with families, and towards supporting young people to participate in the community.

4.4 Priority 3: Participation and Access

The Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of participation and access as a key priority in the Plan.

4.4.1 Introduction

The Youth Coalition acknowledges the draft Plan's recognition of Canberra as a child friendly city and the associated commitment to young people's right to full community participation and access to services. The draft Plan acknowledges young people's participation across an array of areas including: education, training and employment; volunteering; fundraising; sport; recreation; culture; arts; and, policy and planning.

The draft Plan recognises the right of all young people to access services and information relative to needs. The draft Plan acknowledges challenges to access and participation including public transport, bullying and discrimination.

The importance of access to education, training and educational attainment outcomes is noted. However, the Youth Coalition emphasises the gap in educational attainment and limited service choices for at risk groups¹⁹.

The Youth Coalition highlights the need for consistency between the overview of participation and access, the goals, identified strategies and indicators.

Recommendation 30

That Priority 3 of the ACT Young People's Plan include a comprehensive overview of access and participation including: education; training and employment; volunteering; fundraising; sport; recreation; culture; arts; policy and planning; and support services.

4.4.2 Goals

The Youth Coalition acknowledges the generalised goal to promote rights, education, employment and training. However, full participation in the community is a broader concept than education and employment and we call for a wider range of goals in the Plan to acknowledge the wide range of participation highlighted in the access and participation introduction.

The Youth Coalition calls for education, employment and training to be identified as a specific priority area. (See Section 4.1 for more information).

The Youth Coalition calls for Goal 2 of Priority 3 to not just 'encourage' participation in community building but to ensure young people are supported to participate. The Youth Coalition emphasises the need for supports and clearly identified mechanisms to engage young people in community building and decision making.

Recommendation 31

That Priority 3 the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 clearly define participation in priority 3 to include full participation and citizenship; not merely education and employment participation requirements.

Recommendation 32

That the second Goal in Priority 3 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 be rephrased to ensure young people are supported to participate.

4.4.3 Strategies

While the Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of key strategies in the draft Plan (as outlined in Appendix 6 of the draft Plan), it is unclear whether these strategies are intended to be for the life of the plan, or only for 2009.

Where the ACT Government Strategies are referred to as strategies to address specific goals (for example, *Future Directions: Towards Challenge 2014, strategic priorities 2009-14*; under *encourage young people to participate in building our community*), the specific actions within those strategies should be included. Currently this priority does not include any new strategies or initiatives relating to access and participation of young people in the ACT that have not been previously announced, or are not part of other ACT Government strategies.

The Youth Coalition acknowledges the links within the strategy, between youth attainment, transitions and participation. However, the Youth Coalition highlights the Strategy does not include mechanisms which increase support, service capacity or alternatives for vulnerable young people who are not study or work ready.

The youth sector identified young people with disability in schools as being at high risk of experiencing barriers to access and participation²⁰. While we acknowledge the Strategy promoting access in public schools, services have identified in transitioning from school, meaningful choices in employment and education, limited continuity of service provision through life stages, difficulty finding opportunities to utilise skills in supportive workplaces, and social inclusion in mainstream settings.

The Youth Coalition commends support for young people across trade, productivity, apprenticeships and transitions.

The Youth Coalition commends the Youth Interact strategy and ongoing development of the Youth Advisory Council, website, consultation, awards and scholarships but highlight the need for strategies providing ongoing consultation of young people across a wide range of groups and transparency around the role, power and decisions affected by consultation.

Recommendation 33

That Priority 3 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include **new** strategies and initiatives relating to improving young people experiencing barriers to access and participation, including consultation with young people.

4.4.4 Progress Indicators

The Youth Coalition highlights participation in the community is more than Year 12 or equivalent education and highlights the need for measurable indicators that provide an overview of young people's participation in the community.

The Youth Coalition acknowledges the difficulty of measuring accessibility of services and highlights the need for transparent measurement methods and indicators, consultation with young people from a range of cultures and backgrounds, as well as baseline data.

The Youth Coalition believes that the fourth progress indicator in Priority 3 is inadequate, as it only covers access to information and awareness of rights. The Youth Coalition calls for this indicators to include process, auditing rights in the community, accountability to maintain rights or the right to access services and support.

Year 12 attainment is a measurable indicator but very broad. The Youth Coalition highlights the need to monitor the participation of vulnerable young people. Suggested indicators could include:

- Indicators included in the 'ARACY report card on the wellbeing of young people',²¹
- Percentage of young people not in education, training or employment; and,
- Specific indicators to monitor participation, service access and outcomes closing the gap for vulnerable young people including but not exclusive to Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander young people, young people with refugee

backgrounds, young people with disability, young carers, and young people exiting detention.

Recommendation 34

That Priority 3 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include specific and measurable progress indicators relating to young people's access and participation.

Recommendation 35

That Priority 3 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include specific and measurable progress indicators on young people's rights including measurement of process, rights in the community, maintenance of rights, and access to services and support.

4.5 Priority 4: Transitions and Pathways

The Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of transitions and pathways as a key priority in the Plan.

4.5.1 Introduction

The Youth Coalition commends the draft Plan's coverage of a wide range of transitions and the acknowledgement that it is 'important young people find the right pathways to access coordinated support and services that are responsive to their needs.'²² However, some key transitions need to be emphasised if the Plan is to be meaningful, most specifically the magnitude and importance of employment, education and training, and housing.

The Youth Coalition identifies a need for the Plan to address employment, education and training, and housing as key priorities in the Plan; rather than absorbed into existing priorities like transitions and pathways (see Section 4.1 for more information).

The Youth Coalition highlights the positive outcomes from early intervention and prevention and holistic support of young people in education through well-resourced pastoral care and student services and well-defined links to a range of resourced alternative education settings and community services²³.

The Youth Coalition highlights the consistent call from community sector and education providers for strategies to increase cultural awareness and accessibility of staff and institutions as well as resourced numeracy and literacy catch up settings²⁴.

The Youth Coalition welcomes the inclusion of key transition points, but also highlight the importance of including other transition points, as stipulated in the Youth Coalition's *Submission to the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 Discussion Paper*, including:

- Education: High school to college, college to tertiary study;
- Employment: Leaving school to work, working part time to working full time, earning an income;
- Developmental stages: mental, emotional, physical, sexual transitions;
- Transitions in personal relationships (friends, family, partners);
- Independence: Income, healthcare, living skills; and,
- Transitions for specific groups of young people, for example: young parents, young carers, newly arrived or refugee young people, alcohol and other drug use, disabled young people, young people in the justice system, young people in care

Recommendation 36

That Priority 4 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include a comprehensive overview of transitions and pathways including:

- Education: High school to college, college to tertiary study;
- Employment: Leaving school to work, working part time to working full time, earning an income;
- Developmental stages: mental, emotional, physical, sexual transitions;
- Transitions in personal relationships (friends, family, partners);
- Independence: Income, healthcare, living skills; and,
- Transitions for specific groups of young people, for example: young parents, young carers, newly arrived or refugee young people, alcohol and other drug use, disabled young people, young people in the justice system, young people in care.

Recommendation 18

That the priorities of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include housing and homelessness as a stand alone key priority.

Recommendation 19

That the priorities of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include education, employment and training as a stand alone key priority.

4.5.2 Goals

The Youth Coalition acknowledges the cumulative coverage of access to services and information across goals one to three of transitions and pathways. The Youth Coalition commends the emphasis on access to support services but calls for specific goals directed at employment, education and training as well as housing.

Recommendation 37

That Priorities of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 - 2014 include specific goals directed at employment, education and housing.

4.5.3 Strategies

While the Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of key strategies in the draft plan (as outlined in appendix 6 of the draft Plan), it is unclear whether these strategies are intended to be for the life of the plan, or only for 2009.

Currently this priority does not include any new strategies or initiatives relating to transitions and pathways of young people in the ACT that have not been previously announced, or are not part of other ACT Government strategies.

The Youth Coalition recognises the importance of the Canberra Institute of Technology as an education pathway however there is no mention of alternative education, youth centre pathways or ways to improve linkages.

Strategies acknowledge a specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander targeted strategy through the Canberra Institute of Technology but there is not a general focus on strategies to close the education gap including numeracy and literacy catch up or cultural awareness training for schools and staff.²⁵

Furthermore, there is no strategy that adequately targets young carers, young people in detention or young people experiencing mental health or alcohol and other drug issues.

The Future Pathways Guide identified in the draft Plan acknowledges the challenges of young people with disability in regard to transitions. However the Youth Coalition calls for the Plan to identify specific strategies to target sector wide challenges in forward planning and capacity shortages in programs²⁶.

The draft Plan identifies the implementation of national strategies like the Compact with Young Australians, the National Partnership on Educational Attainment and Transitions, and apprenticeship schemes. However, we highlight the need for strategies to provide support and safety nets for young people with high needs, including meaningful choices in education and increased course availability.

The Youth Coalition commends the targeted strategy 'moving forward with English as a second language' and emphasises the need for such strategies in supporting young people with refugee backgrounds and closing the education gap in the ACT. The Youth Coalition emphasises the need for strategies that provide specialised knowledge, career advice and goal setting.

The identification of Student Pathways Planning as a strategy relies on the capacity, skills and connectedness of student services, pastoral care teams, school counselors, youth workers and careers advisors across the education sector. The Youth Coalition recognises the need to design strategies that target the strengthening of student services and wellbeing staff as well as promoting connectedness to the community sector.

Student Pathways Planning may provide access to holistic support and guidance for young people engaged at school however the draft Plan does not identify strategies to improve supports and guidance for young people already disengaged from education.

Accessing safe, affordable and appropriate housing is an essential transition and is an essential foundation in a young person's ability to access or transition into education, employment, and most community activities. The Youth Coalition highlights there is no targeted housing strategy or mention of the housing stock, crisis accommodation, medium term or transitional housing in the draft Plan.

The Youth Coalition emphasises the gap in housing and homelessness case management and support services for 12-14 year olds²⁷ and emphasizes the importance of recognition and specific planning to cover service gaps.

The Youth Coalition recognises the importance the goal to support young people through developmental transitions by providing information and access to support services. However, we believe that it is inadequate to include only the ACT Children's Plan as a strategy to address this. Furthermore, the Youth Coalition questions the relevance of the ACT Children's Plan in supporting young people through developmental transitions. The Youth Coalition calls for the Plan to include further strategies to support young people through developmental transitions.

Recommendation 37

That Priority 4 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include **new** strategies and initiatives relating to improving pathways and transitions for young people.

4.5.4 Progress Indicators

The identification of progress indicators is undermined by the aspirational, broad, non-specific and immeasurable nature of the identified progress indicators. The Youth Coalition believes progress indicators should be clearly defined, including the measurement process with baseline data where available.

The Youth Coalition calls for specific indicators to monitor services and outcomes closing the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander young people, young people with refugee backgrounds, young people with disability, young carers, and young people exiting from detention.

Suggested indicators could include:

- Indicators included in the 'ARACY report card of wellbeing of young people';²⁸
- A decrease in the percentage of young people not in education, training or employment; and,
- Increased satisfaction among young people and youth services relating to housing transitions for young people.

Recommendation 38

That Priority 4 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include specific and measurable progress indicators relating to young people's transitions and pathways.

4.6 Priority 5: Environment and Sustainability

The Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of environment and sustainability as a key priority area.

4.6.1 Introduction

The draft Plan provides basic information about the importance of sustainability for the Canberra community and alludes to young people's needs for high quality and affordable services, facilities, transport and accommodation. However, the Youth Coalition believes that this section is broad in its scope and limited in its information, failing to provide a detailed picture of environment and sustainability issues for young people in the ACT.

The Youth Coalition suggests that this section of the Plan should provide an overview of the barriers young people experience in relation to participating and contributing to the environment, and in particular sustainability, in the context of access to high quality and affordable services, facilities, transport and accommodation.

Recommendation 39

That Priority 5 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include a comprehensive overview of the barriers young people experience in relation to participating and contributing to the environment and sustainability.

4.6.2 Goals

The Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of environment and sustainability goals in the draft Plan.

Public transport was highlighted in the draft Plan as a key area of concern, as identified by young people, however the indicators do not reflect this. Access to public

transport is critical to young people as they are less able to access alternative transport.²⁹ This is significant when one considers that lack of access to transport due to problems of affordability, safety, availability, convenience and appropriateness of the type of transport available can act as a significant barrier to young people's participation in the range of social, civic and economic activities of mainstream society.³⁰

In relation to the second goal under this priority, 'encourage young people to learn about their ecological footprint and the measures they can take to reduce this', the Youth Coalition believes this should be rephrased to 'supporting young people to take these measures'.

Recommendation 40

That Priority 5 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 rephrase Goal 2 to include 'supporting young people to take these measures.'

4.6.3 Strategies

While the Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of key strategies in the draft Plan (as outlined in Appendix 6 of the draft Plan), it is unclear whether these strategies are intended to be for the life of the Plan, or only for 2009.

Where other ACT Government Strategies are referred to as strategies to address specific goals (for example, *People, Place, Prosperity*; under *Assist and support young people to raise awareness of the environment and sustainability*, and, the *Sustainable Transport Action Plan*; under *Support young people to be involved in decision-making regarding the environment and sustainability*), the specific actions within those Strategies should be included. Currently, this priority contains limited strategies or initiatives directly relating to the environment and sustainability issues facing young people in the ACT region; rather, it leans on existing strategies, many of which have already commenced or been completed.

Recommendation 41

That Priority 5 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include **new** strategies and initiatives relating to improving young people's participation and contribution to environment and sustainability issues and increased support for young people in relation to sustainability.

4.6.4 Progress Indicators

While the Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of progress indicators relating to environment and sustainability in the ACT, we find that those included in the draft Plan are limited. This priority should include specific progress indicators relating to young people's participation and contribution to environment and sustainability; and also around support provided to young people (e.g. through improvements to the public transport system).

Additional progress indicators could include:

- Increased satisfaction among young people regarding environment and sustainability outcomes;
- Increased opportunities for all young people to provide feedback on issues of environment and sustainability;
- Increased accessibility and affordability of accommodation for young people;
- Increased access to services and facilities for young people;

- Increased accessibility of public transport in the ACT; and,
- Increased mechanisms to support young people to participate and contribute to environment and sustainability issues.

Recommendation 42

That Priority 5 of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include specific progress indicators relating to young people's participation and contribution to environment and sustainability issues and increased support for young people in relation to sustainability.

5. Delivering the Plan

Section 5 of this submission outlines the Youth Coalition's response to *Part 3: Delivering the Plan* in the draft Young People's Plan.

5.1 Governance Structure

The Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of a governance structure in the draft Plan, including the commitment by the ACT Government to establish a community advisory group to assist in the implementation of the Plan.

While the Youth Coalition supports the establishment of the Children and Young People Taskforce, it is unclear who its membership will be. The Youth Coalition calls for the Plan to include a membership list for the Taskforce, and also to clearly articulate its aim and objectives.

While the Youth Coalition supports the establishment of a community advisory group for young people, it is also important to ensure that a key objective of this group is not only to assist with the implementation of the Plan; but also to contribute to the development of Annual Action Plans, evaluation and review mechanisms. We also call for these groups to meet more often than bi-annually, or to form sub-groups, in order to ensure effective input.

The Youth Coalition also notes that the draft Plan does not include an evaluation framework; and call for this to be a key objective for both the Taskforce and the Community Advisory Groups.

Recommendation 43

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include more information on the Children and Young People Taskforce, including its aim and objectives; and a membership list.

Recommendation 44

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 expand the role of the Community Advisory Group for young people to ensure that a key objective of the group is to contribute to the development of Annual Action Plans, evaluation and review mechanisms, and planning for the Young People's Plan in 2015.

Recommendation 45

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include an evaluation framework.

5.2 Action Plans

The Youth Coalition supports the commitment by the ACT Government to develop Annual Action Plans to implement the Young People's Plan. We highlight the importance of ensuring that the 2010 Annual Action Plan is released by January 2010, to ensure implementation of the Plan can begin in a timely manner.

In addition, the Plan should include a timeframe that outlines when each Annual Action Plan will be developed (with input from the Community Advisory Group for young people) and made available, prior to its implementation period.

The Youth Coalition also draws attention to Appendix 6 in the draft Plan. It is unclear whether Appendix 6 is an implementation plan for the entire life of the Plan, or only for 2009. It is hoped that Appendix 6 is **not** an implementation plan for the life of the

Plan; as it does not contain any new strategies or initiatives to progress youth affairs in the ACT (please see Section 4 for more information).

Recommendation 46

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 develop an Annual Action Plan for 2010 for release in January 2010, to ensure implementation can begin in a timely manner.

Recommendation 47

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include a timeframe that outlines when each Annual Action Plan will be developed (with input from the Community Advisory Group) and made available, prior to its implementation period.

5.3 Progress Indicators

The Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of progress indicators, but have raised a number of concerns – please see Section 4 for more information.

5.4 Planning for 2015+

This year has seen the update of a number of key ACT Government strategies and frameworks, and the Youth Coalition is concerned that adequate processes are not in place to ensure continuity of implementation across each of these strategies and frameworks.

The development of the Plan provides a key opportunity for the ACT Government to begin planning for the development of the next Young People's Plan in 2015. As discussed in Section 5.1, a clear evaluation framework will support the ACT Government to work towards developing an effective Plan in 2015. The development of an updated Social and Demographic Profile of Young People in the ACT will ensure it is based upon up-to-date information.

In order to advance the status of young people in the ACT, the Plan should include a timeframe and by which to develop the following Young People's Plan in 2015.

Recommendation 48

That the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014 include a timeframe and workplan by which to develop the following Young People's Plan in 2015 (which includes the development of a new Social and Demographic Profile of Young People in the ACT, by 2015).

6. Conclusion

The Youth Coalition would like to thank the ACT Government for providing this second opportunity to contribute to the further development of the ACT Young People's Plan 2009 - 2014. We commend the commitment by the ACT Government to developing a Plan based upon community consultation and key stakeholder feedback.

The Youth Coalition acknowledges the significant amount of work has gone into the development of the Plan by the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support, DHCS. However, in this submission we also identify many opportunities by which the ACT Government can build upon the existing strengths, provide additional information and further progress youth affairs in the ACT.

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