



ACT Budget: Education Support & Job Creation Key for Young People

Analysis of the ACT Budget 2014 / 15

Part 1 of 2

Overview, Priorities, and Media Releases

June 2014

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 Ngunnawal culture and the invaluable contribution it makes to our community.

The Youth Coalition of the ACT (Youth Coalition) is the peak youth affairs body in the Australian Capital Territory and is responsible for representing the interests of people aged between 12 and 25 years of age and those who work with them. The Youth Coalition works to actively promote the well being and aspirations of young people in the ACT with particular respect to their political, cultural, economic and social development. The Youth Coalition is represented on many ACT advisory structures and provides advice to the ACT Government on a range of issues related to young people and youth services.

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2014 / 15 ACT Budget Analysis

Overview, Priorities, and Media Release

The Youth Coalition's 2014 / 15 ACT Budget Analysis is divided into two parts:

- Part 1: Overview, Priorities, and Media Release (this document)
- Part 2: Expenditure Initiatives and Capital Works

Each part can be downloaded from www.youthcoalition.net or accessed in hard copy by calling (02) 6247 3540.

Introduction and Context

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.¹

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

Young people are a distinct, and often discrete, population group aged between 12 and 25 years. Young people frequently experience systemic disadvantage, discrimination and unequal access to resources.

Canberra has one of the youngest populations of any Australian State or Territory, with approximately 78,000 people aged between 10-24 years residing in the ACT, representing more than 20% of Canberra's population.² 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.

The ACT Government provides or facilitates many of the services that support young people in the ACT. In addition, other services to the community in Canberra have been supported by Australian Government funding, including in recent years through National Partnership Agreements. Community based youth and other services often triangulate local and national funding with resources raised through charitable, philanthropic, or other fundraising efforts, in order to provide a holistic, integrated response to the needs of the ACT community.

The Youth Coalition submission to the 2014 / 15 ACT Budget (October 2013) acknowledged that the change of Australian Government meant that there was uncertainty regarding the direction of Australian Government funding in key areas, and called upon the ACT Government to be prepared and planned in terms of responding to any shortfall or significant change in funding levels in these key areas of service to the community, such as education, housing, legal services, and health.

¹ ACT Government, 2011, *Canberra Social Plan*, <http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/policystrategic/socialplan>

² Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013, *Population by Age and Sex, Regions of Australia*.

Even with the writing on the wall regarding the new Australian Government's desire to reduce spending, the announcement of the degree to which the investment in those key areas is to be scaled back was devastating for many in the youth sector. The Australian Government's budget heralded unprecedented shifts in social policy affecting young people, such as the policy that young job seekers will be ineligible for income support for 6 months.

In one budget the Australian Government re-framed young people as deficit, problematic, not of equal value as other members of the community, and likely to 'sit on the couch at home and pick up a welfare cheque' unless motivated by punitive measures to seek employment. In addition, *Work for the Dole* has been renewed, despite evidence that previous iterations of this program fell short of successfully developing employability skills or helping participants gain experience or training that is transferable to future employment.³

The Youth Coalition has increasingly called for the ACT Government to respond to the gaps created by the shortfall and changes in funding at the Australian Government level. The Youth Coalition recognises that this challenge is compounded by the Australian Government's declaration that 'the age of entitlement is over', and the conspicuous absence of any national vision or investment in critical support to address access to education and training for disadvantaged and vulnerable young Australians.

The task for the ACT Government to tailor their budget in response to the changing federal context in a relatively short space of time was not an easy one. As such, the Youth Coalition applauded the ACT Chief Minister in calling a number of community round tables to discuss the likely impact of the proposed Australian Government Budget on the Territory's economy and services before finalising the ACT Budget.

Of particular note to the Youth Coalition was the inclusion of a youth focused round table, which was predominately attended by young people, including representatives from the Universities, social support services for young people, young people involved in volunteering, and ACT peak bodies. The Youth Coalition attended this meeting, as well as another round table convened specifically for the community sector.

Participants at the youth round table were united regarding the top priority for ACT Government investment and leadership for young people in the ACT: jobs creation. The importance of ensuring the availability of jobs for young people, and the support to assist them to develop, engage with, and achieve clear employment pathways was identified across a range of demographic sub groups also.

Students spoke to the loss of skills and qualifications from the ACT, as young people complete study but have to leave Canberra to find work. Social support service providers and peak bodies raised particular concern about the impact that the end of the Youth Connections program (funded by the Australian Government) in December 2014 will have, specifically in creating a huge gap in service for the most vulnerable.

All participants in the round table also agreed that creating employment for young people was key to addressing other significant challenges facing Canberra's young people, such as access to affordable housing and health care.

³ Borland, J, and Tseng, 2003, *Does 'Work for the Dole' work? An Australian perspective on work experience programs*, University of Melbourne, Melbourne.

Reducing youth unemployment is undeniably a complex issue, with no single solution. A range of different approaches is required, as is effective coordination and concentration of the efforts of governments, business and community. Strong employment growth is critical to the future prospects of our young people.⁴

Overview and General Comments

Overall, the 2014 / 15 ACT Budget delivered on 3 June was welcomed by the Youth Coalition.

The ACT Government announced a budget that they believe provides measures to counter the reduction of Australian Government contribution to the ACT economy (as the Australian Government cuts employment, funding and other local investment) and to provide some relief for lower income earners whose household budgets will be significantly affected by federal policies.

While this budget will see the ACT remain in deficit at the end of the financial year, the Youth Coalition supports the ACT Government decision to not make dramatic cuts to spending and we believe that the strategy of continuing to invest in projects (such as those in the infrastructure program, in order to stimulate the economy and promote jobs creation) will provide more opportunity for young people.

However, the challenges ahead for young people in Australia will be significant, and whether all young people will have access to the quality of life we have come to expect in the ACT will likely depend on the ACT community's ability to create jobs. The Youth Coalition believes that the ACT Government has taken the first steps and shown leadership in this area, and that it will be important in the coming months for government, community and business sectors to work together to identify broader and longer term strategies to ensure that young Canberrans can look to a future where they will have opportunity for full economic participation.

In the shorter term, we encourage the ACT Government to consider implementing targets and strategies in all projects that anticipate creating jobs (such as the infrastructure program) to ensure that these jobs employ people from specific demographics who might be more vulnerable to unemployment.

The Youth Coalition believes there is also great opportunity in our sector, community services, to look at how we support employment pathways for young people into our workforces.

Key initiatives announced in the 2014 / 15 ACT Budget included investment of funding to:

- Build a digital platform to provide access to core government services
- Operationalise the Human Services Blueprint through a trial in West Belconnen
- Expand the Strengthening Families Project
- Prepare for the Out of Home Care Strategy
- Assist low-income households to meet the costs of essential services
- Help young people develop ideas for establishing local businesses

⁴ Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2014, *Investing in our Future: Opportunities for the Australian Government to boost youth employment* http://www.bsl.org.au/pdfs/Investing_in_our_future_2014.pdf

- Expand community mental health services
- Provide more staff to Health and Walk-In Centres
- Establish a single Human Services Gateway
- Support homelessness services for the next 12 months
- Research Justice Reinvestment measures
- Continue the Throughcare Project

The Youth Coalition supports the new investment in developing systems and structures in human services with the potential to transform the way people access, and then determine and direct, the supports they need. This includes funding to implement the Human Services Blueprint, investment in transition to NDIS, and very importantly the Out of Home Care Strategy. Additionally we commend the further investment in projects that shown great outcomes such as the Strengthening Families Project.

The Youth Coalition notes, however, that many of the initiatives funded under the Community Services Directorate only include funding for one year. We understand that there is an intent to roll out the Human Services Blueprint in other regions next, building on the learning from the evaluation of the West Belconnen implementation. We also acknowledge that the Out of Home Care Strategy is still being finalised, and highlight the feedback from our members that the strategy looks promising. However, the implementation of the Out of Home Care Strategy will be costly, and if all the elements of the strategy are not adequately funded we may struggle to effect the changes needed.

The money invested in matching the Australian Government's extension of funding to homelessness services is applauded, but again only covers these essential services for one year. While the Youth Coalition understands the range of factors that have created these short term arrangements, we are concerned about the ongoing uncertainty regarding these services and programs. Short term funding arrangements can limit the ability of services to support members of the community who are in significant distress and/or vulnerability. When agencies operate without funding certainty, they are reluctant to start support and then withdraw early, fearing this break of trust can cause further harm to the people seeking support. The continued state of uncertainty can also have a negative impact on the workforce, and be a contributing factor to staff burnout, turnover, disengagement or ill health.

The Youth Coalition is pleased to see some investment in exploring justice reinvestment research and strategy, which we have been calling for over a number of years. This sits alongside significant investment in capital works and staffing to expand the capacity of Alexander Maconochie Centre, highlighting the need to better understand the balance of investment in immediate needs with investment in preventative and early intervention measures that will reduce cost over time.

The Youth Coalition is disappointed that the issues and recommendations raised in our budget submission in relation to education have not been addressed. We believe that educational engagement is not only a key part of supporting young people's employment pathways, but is a significant factor in addressing health, reducing engagement in crime and entry into the youth justice system, and preventing youth homelessness.

The 2012 Youth Coalition survey of young people aged 12-25, Rate Canberra, found that 'school work or study' topped the list of personal concerns that were most frequently rated

as 'affecting my life and it is worrying me' with 33% of the approximately 1400 respondents nominating this answer.⁵

While the ACT has continued to achieve the highest rates of attainment for Year 12 or equivalent school or non-school qualification, this has risen by only a small amount from 88% in 2001 to 91% in 2011. In 2009, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) signed the National Education Agreement, in which the ACT committed to reaching a target of 95% by 2015.⁶

The Youth Coalition also remains concerned about the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous educational achievement and attainment rates. In comparison to the data above, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the ACT had an attainment level of 71% in 2011.⁷

For vulnerable young people in the ACT, whether they engage with education and have positive experiences is one of the most significant determinants of their longer term capacity to fully participate, economically and socially, in our community.

Key Priorities for Young People & Youth Sector

Key priorities that the Youth Coalition identified in its submission to the 2014 / 15 ACT Budget were:

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

A summary of key commitments of the 2014 / 15 ACT Budget in these priority areas is noted below. A more comprehensive list of initiatives and analysis is provided under each ACT Government Directorate in *Part 2: Expenditure and Capital Works*.

Education

Initiatives and commitments in 2014 / 15 ACT Budget relating to education include:

Expense Initiative & Capital Works

- CIT Campus Modernisation – Tuggeranong Campus

Capital Works

- Belconnen Region Schools – Modernisation
- Sustaining Smart Schools – Digital Infrastructure for our schools

⁵ Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2012, *Rate Canberra: Findings from the Survey of Young People Aged 12-25 in the ACT*

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013, *Year 12 Achievement and Continuing Education*, Reflecting a Nation: Stories from the 2011 Census, 2012–2013

⁷ COAG Reform Council, 2013, *Indigenous Reform 2011–12: Comparing performance across Australia*

The Youth Coalition submission to the 2014 / 15 ACT Budget called on the ACT Government to:

- *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);*
- *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;*

These recommendations were not reflected within the ACT Budget 2014-15.

The Youth Coalition is very concerned about the gap in services to support vulnerable young people to engage in education and employment pathways. This gap is created by the cessation of federal government initiatives, in particular the loss of the Youth Connections program which ends in December 2014. While we acknowledge the challenge for the ACT Government in compensating for this change in national policy direction, the Youth Coalition is concerned about the loss of skilled specialist services and workers that currently assist vulnerable young people to transition to further education, training, or employment. Experience indicates that the expectation that generalist services will fill this gap is rarely realised, and relies on proper investment in staff to up-skill workers and program development to target support for young people.

The known trajectories for young people who disengage from formal education mean that the Youth Coalition will continue to seek a commitment from ACT Government to resource specialist youth services, workers, and programs to ensure that vulnerable young people do not fall through the gaps. The evidence is clear that supporting all young people to maintain pathways to education, training or employment is critical to addressing significant social concerns in our community, such as poverty, homelessness, and unemployment.

The Youth Coalition believes that it is essential for the ACT Government to continue build the capacity of the ACT education system to be flexible and responsive to the needs of all students. We acknowledge that initiatives such as ACT Flexible Learning Options (FLO) Program (which supersedes the Alternative Programs) intend to do this, however, we continue to note that funding for individual FLO projects is capped at \$15,000, and that this model relies on a level of existing resource capacity (such as staffing) within community-based organisational partners that may limit what is able to be delivered under this initiative.

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

The Youth Coalition remains concerned that the gap in retention rates and educational attainment between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the rest of the population is still significant, and continues to advocate for increased investment in programs targeting support and educational outcomes for this cohort.

- *Increase support for preventative and front-line 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.*
- *Ensure that community based specialist youth services are properly resourced to be able to engage with and provide service within schools.*
- *Invest in the resources, tools, and support necessary to facilitate schools' implementation of the Engaging Schools Framework.*

These recommendations were not reflected within the ACT Budget 2014 / 15.

The Youth Coalition welcomes the modest increase in health and mental health investment within the ACT Budget. However, we are concerned that preventative and front-line health is not clearly integrated in schools. Schools are recognised as 'first-to-know' agencies regarding many aspects of young people's lives. The embedding of supports such as health professionals, youth workers, social workers, and psychologists within schools can deliver more integrated, efficient and effective services. Further, the successful deployment of these disciplines assists schools to be the dynamic, successful communities that improve the life opportunities for all Canberrans, as the *ACT Youth Commitment* aspires.

Unprecedented changes in federal policy direction and investment in young Australians means that ensuring the mobilisation and integration of effective, targeted, and resourced preventative health and social supports in schools has increased in urgency. The ACT has a number of key elements in place working towards ensuring schools are accessible and responsive to young people and families in local networks and communities, however the Youth Coalition continues to highlight the need for greater engagement and coordination between the community services and education sectors. We believe that there is strong support for this across both sectors, reflected in the *ACT Engaging Schools Framework*; however, the expectation that we will arrive at effective integrated service provision without increased and targeted resourcing is unrealistic.

The Youth Coalition highlights that ACT community-based children, youth, and family support services are well positioned to integrate and provide responses with and across the education, youth justice, care and protection, adult corrections, and health systems. However, while acknowledging that there is funding provided to the community sector to do some of this work, many of these programs and services are small, and the level of service needed to meet the vision of the *Engaging Schools Framework* (and *Youth Justice Blueprint*, *Out of Home Care Strategy*, *Throughcare* project, among others) of an integrated community service component exceeds current capacity.

While the Youth Coalition applauds the adoption of the *Engaging Schools Framework* in the ACT, we continue to be concerned that the opportunity presented by the Framework will be missed if there is no clear cross-sector resourcing associated with its implementation.

Housing and Homelessness

Initiatives and commitments in 2014 / 15 ACT Budget in relating to Housing and Homelessness include:

Expense Initiatives

- Better Human Services – Human Services Gateway
- Common Ground – Providing services
- Continued Support for Homelessness Services
- Homelessness Sector Reform – Evaluation

The Youth Coalition submission to the 2014 / 15 ACT Budget called on the ACT Government to:

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

This recommendation was not reflected within the ACT Budget 2014 / 15.

The Youth Coalition welcomes the announcement of budget initiatives such as cuts to stamp duty and the expansion of concessions to assist low income households. However, there is little in the ACT Budget 2014 / 15 that specifically addresses housing affordability for young people. Despite recent falls, the private rental market in the ACT is among the highest in Australia. Many young people report difficulty in gaining entry to private rent properties due to cost, availability, and discrimination.

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

This recommendation was partially reflected within the ACT Budget 2014 / 15.

The Youth Coalition welcomes the ACT Government's continued support to homelessness services in providing additional funding consistent with the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness. However, we note that this funding is only for the next financial year, and while acknowledging that there is no clarity regarding where the Australian Government is heading with regard to homelessness policy or funding, we urge the ACT Government to proactively take measures that will ensure the level of current service delivery is maintained.

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

This recommendation was not reflected within the ACT Budget 2014 / 15.

This recommendation was included in the Youth Coalition's budget submission in response to our members and stakeholders continuing to raise concern about young people's experience in being able to access support services. The Youth Coalition welcomes the effort to simplify access to the human services system by establishing a single *Human Services Gateway*. The Youth Coalition recommends that as the three existing intake services are consolidated, the skills and knowledge of the youth sector, and help seeking patterns of young people, are reflected in the design and implementation of intake, assessment, and referral services. A clear understanding of and commitment to addressing

young people's experiences and needs is essential for making it easier for young people to find the support they need, at the time they need it.

Transport and Planning

Key initiatives and commitments in 2014 / 15 ACT Budget in relating to Transport and Planning include:

Expense Initiatives

- Capital Metro – Scoping and facilitation \$21 million 2014/15
- Taxi Subsidy Scheme, \$112,000 in 2014/15
- ACTION – Improved public transport, \$2 million over 4 years
- Parks and Open Spaces – Maintaining amenity, \$15.2 million over 4 years
- Transport for Canberra – Improved community transport coordination, \$500,000 in 2014/15

Capital Works

- iConnect
- Woden Bus Interchange Redevelopment Stage 1 \$3.25 million over 2 years
- City Plan Implementation
- Local Shopping Centre Upgrades Program, \$2 million over 2 years
- Transport for Canberra – Upgrading Erindale bus station, \$900,000 in 2014/15
- Transport for Canberra – Walking and cycling infrastructure – Stage 4, \$2.5 million over 2 years

The Youth Coalition submission to the 2014 / 15 ACT Budget called on the ACT Government to:

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

This recommendation was partially reflected within the ACT Budget 2014 / 15.

The Youth Coalition welcomes additional public transport funding for weekend services to new suburbs in Canberra, but we continue to call for further investment to improve and increase public transport services to the whole of Canberra.

In responding to 2012 Rate Canberra Survey, young people from the ACT frequently identify limited transport accessibility as a barrier to their participation in employment, education, and recreational activities.⁸

Additionally, the Youth Coalition advocates for the immediate investment in affordable, safe and reliable public transport to allow young people maximum access to employment and education.

⁸ Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2012, *Rate Canberra 2012: Findings from the survey of Young People aged 12-25 in the ACT*

- *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.*

This recommendation is potentially met within the ACT Budget 2014 / 15.

A number of Expense and Capital Works Initiatives have been identified in the ACT Budget, related to public space and transport options. While specific resource towards implementing the '*Child and Youth Friendly City*' approach (a commitment of both the ACT Children's Plan 2009-2014, and ACT Young People's Plan 2009-2014) have not been identified, the Youth Coalition believes that a number of these initiative will be of benefit to young people. To fully implement a '*Child and Youth Friendly City*' approach would involve children and young people having input to the design and implementation of these projects. The Youth Coalition believes there is a number of opportunities in this program that will benefit from keeping the well being of children and young people at the centre of planning, and could easily involve children and young people in design and implementation.

Early Intervention and Prevention

The Youth Coalition submission to the 2014 / 15 ACT Budget called on the ACT Government to:

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

This recommendation was not reflected within the ACT Budget 2014 / 15.

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

While this recommendation was not actioned, there are a number of promising projects outlined in the 2014 / 15 Budget using a whole-of-government approach. The Youth Coalition recommends that whole-of-government initiatives include genuine investment and engagement in early intervention and prevention, and that all ACT Directorates participate in and contribute to projects such the *Human Services Blueprint*, and the *Strengthening Families Project*. The Youth Coalition remains committed to asking the ACT Government to work in an integrated manner and providing leadership with regard to early intervention and prevention.



MEDIA RELEASE

3 June 2014

ACT Budget Intends to Soften Federal Budget Blows for Young People

The Youth Coalition of the ACT, Canberra's peak body for youth affairs, has welcomed the ACT Government's acknowledgement of the significant challenges facing young people as federal budget measures look set to withdraw key supports and programs.

'It was a strong message that the Chief Minister took time out to talk specifically with young people and the youth sector following the federal budget announcements', said Emma Robertson, Youth Coalition Director.

'The message from young Canberrans is that they are really concerned about jobs and employment pathways.'

'With predictions of rising unemployment, and the proposed withdrawal of income support for young job seekers for 6 months of each year, we are concerned that young people, particularly those whose families don't have capacity to fully support them financially to the age of 30, will be left unable to meet basic costs of living.'

'ACT Budget initiatives such as the start up of **Young Business Connect**, which will see \$300,000 provided to assist young entrepreneurs to develop ideas for establishing new local businesses, show that the ACT Government listened to those concerns, and has taken the first step in inviting the ACT Community to, "work together to build a positive story about our young people in this town".'

'While the Youth Coalition welcomes investment in infrastructure, and projects that will see direct employment of young people in traineeships and apprenticeships, there is still more work to be done to ensure that all young Canberrans have access to and are supported to engage in education, skills development, and career pathways.'

'We have raised major concern about the gap that will exist in support for vulnerable young people to engage in positive educational outcomes as the highly successful federally funded Youth Connections Program winds up in December.'

'This will be a significant loss for the ACT, and in this tight fiscal environment the Youth Coalition will be looking to ACT Government to ensure that existing resources are mobilised to ensure that no young person falls through the cracks'.

"Education and training is key to creating a dynamic, successful community and improving life opportunities for all Canberrans". (ACT Youth Commitment)

For further comment please contact Emma Robertson on 0422 665 469