



Submission to the ACT Government 2009/10 Budget

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

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December 2008

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1. Introduction

1.1 About the Youth Coalition of the ACT

The Youth Coalition of the ACT (the Youth Coalition) is the peak youth affairs body in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). Comprised of 75 members, programs, and individuals the Youth Coalition is responsible for representing and promoting rights, interests and wellbeing of people aged between 12 and 25 years and those who work with them.

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. As the peak body for youth affairs, 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.

The Youth Coalition welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the ACT Government Budget. The 2009/10 Budget Submission is the Youth Coalition's tenth contribution to the development of the ACT Government Budget, and is based on the following:

- 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 ACT Government Budget;
- One-on-one consultations with member services and organisations; and,
- Current and topical research on youth affairs.

This submission represents an opportunity for the Youth Coalition to identify and advise ACT Government of areas in need of additional resources and emerging issues; provide a central point for members to raise issues and access the public submission process; and ensure that the ACT Government is accountable to election promises and other commitments.

1.2 Young People in the ACT

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

Canberra has one of the youngest populations of any Australian State or Territory, with approximately 70,000 young people residing in the ACT, representing almost 22% of Canberra's population.¹ With over one fifth of Canberra's population comprised of young people, it is important that the wellbeing of young people be regarded as an indicator of the ACT's future population health and development.

1.3 Format and framing of this submission

The highest attainable standard of health is a fundamental right to be enjoyed by all young people, as outlined in Article 24 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.² The World Health Organization defines health as not simply the absence of disease or illness, but rather a state of “complete physical, mental and social wellbeing”.³ Additionally, the *Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion* lists the fundamental prerequisites and social determinants for good health as peace, shelter, education, food, income, a stable ecosystem, sustainable resources, social justice and equity.⁴

Health outcomes in young people are influenced by a broad range of social factors, including social exclusion, work, social support, access to accommodation and transport, and stress. Some young people experience lower levels of health that correlate with their socio-economic status, housing arrangements and cultural backgrounds, requiring additional support.

Because of this, all sections of the *Youth Coalition Submission to the ACT Government 2009/10 Budget* relate to ensuring the health of young people in the ACT.

With all of this in mind, the Youth Coalition would like to highlight the following areas for consideration in the development of the upcoming ACT Budget:

- Mental Health;
- Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs;
- Comorbidity;
- Sexual Health;
- Health Services for Young People;
- Housing and Homelessness;
- Justice;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People;
- Multicultural Young People; and,
- Youth Sector.

2. Summary of Recommendations

The Youth Coalition recommends:

Mental Health

Recommendation 1

Cost: Nil

That the ACT Government guarantee there is youth sector representation in the development, implementation and evaluation of the *ACT Mental Health Services Plan 2008 – 2013*; contributes to the *Ministerial Council on Mental Health*; and other key mental health representational activities.

Recommendation 2

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government fulfils its election commitment to provide increased funding for programs that focus on early intervention and prevention in a range of settings, including youth services.

Recommendation 3

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government ensure the development and implementation of a multidisciplinary response to enable young people with eating disorders to access comprehensive treatment and support through existing services based in the ACT.

Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs

Recommendation 4

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government expand access to the tertiary services provided by the Alcohol and Drug Program, ACT Health, to young people under the age of 18 years not involved in the criminal justice system.

Recommendation 5

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government implement the recommendations from the ACT Standing Committee on Health and Disability's report, *The Use of Crystal Methamphetamine 'Ice' in the ACT*, with priority funding being allocated to:

A community based position to research, develop, design and implement a community education for young people aged 18 – 25 years, that aims to provide factual and relevant information about alcohol and other drug use.

Comorbidity

Recommendation 6

That the ACT Government align the *ACT Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Strategy 2009 - 2012* and the draft *ACT Mental Health Services Plan 2008 - 2013* so as to develop meaningful comorbidity policy and services.

Recommendation 7

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government align the *Four Stage Developmental Model* across both Mental Health ACT and the Alcohol and Drug Program to provide targeted comorbid support to young people aged 12 – 25 years.

Sexual Health

Recommendation 8

That the ACT Government allocate funds towards a program targeted at young people aimed at raising awareness and increasing testing of Chlamydia.

Recommendation 9

That the ACT Government provides funding to community-based specialists to work with schools to deliver evidence-based sexual health education and promotion.

Health Services

Recommendation 10

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government fund a community-based *Youth Health Network* to collaboratively improve access to and health services for young people.

Housing and Homelessness

Recommendation 11

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government immediately develop and implement strategies with youth and related services to address homelessness for young people aged 12 - 14 as a matter of urgency.

Recommendation 12

Cost: Nil

That the ACT Government develop a new *Youth Homelessness Action Plan* as a collaborative partnership with young people, youth and community sectors, and in conjunction with national initiatives.

Recommendation 13

Cost: \$100,000

That the ACT Government allocate \$100,000 funding to establish a service similar to the *Kids Under Cover* model in the ACT.

Recommendation 14

Cost: Nil

That the ACT Government waives the six-month waiting period applied to newly arrived and refugee housing applicants.

Recommendation 15

Cost: \$10m (over four years)

- a. That the ACT Government fulfill its target of 10% public housing stock by 2012, and that capital injections into Housing ACT are made over the next four budgets to increase supply.
- b. That the ACT Government seek additional funds from the Australian Government to support strategies to increase the supply of public housing.

Justice

Recommendation 16

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government ensure that there is equity of access to age appropriate health services and expertise for young people in Bimberi Youth Justice Centre as those in the general community.

Recommendation 17

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government ensures programs for detainees in the Alexander Maconochie Centre include specific and targeted initiatives for young people aged 18 – 25 years.

Recommendation 18

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government develop programs with the youth and community sector to ensure the implementation of individual, planned and supported exits for young people exiting the Bimberi Youth Justice Centre, including planning for supported accommodation, living skills training and employment and skills training.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People

Recommendation 19

Cost: \$75,000 (recurrent)

That the ACT Government urgently provide recurrent core funding to Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation to enable it to meet the increasing demand from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the ACT.

Recommendation 20

Cost: \$35,000 (Recurrent)

That the ACT Government urgently provide \$35,000 in recurrent funding to Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation to continue their Indigenous Alternative Education Program.

Recommendation 21

Cost: \$30,000

That the ACT Government urgently provide \$30,000 in recurrent funding to Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation to run their Young Men's Mentor Group, Young Women's Mentor Group and Young Mum's Group.

Multicultural Young People

Recommendation 22

Cost: \$150,000 (recurrent)

That the ACT Government urgently fund Multicultural Youth Services \$150 000 recurrently to provide essential services and support to refugee, newly arrived and multicultural young people in the ACT.

Recommendation 23

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government allocate targeted resources to support young Burmese refugees and their families.

Recommendation 24

Cost: \$40,000

That the ACT Government fund \$40,000 for the secretariat and project management support for a *Multicultural Youth Network* in the ACT

Youth Sector

Recommendation 25

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government uphold its commitment and immediately conduct an independent evaluation of the Youth Services Program to examine areas of unmet need and emerging issues and to inform Youth Services Program contract negotiations and youth policy development.

Recommendation 26

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government immediately develop a new *Young People's Plan* with young people, youth services and key stakeholders to guide whole of government policy and services relating to young people.

Recommendation 27

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government develop an updated social and demographic profile of young people in the ACT.

Recommendation 28

Cost: \$10 000

That the ACT Government fund \$10,000 towards the Youth Centres Modelling Project for youth centres to access consultancy services further develop their practice.

Recommendation 29

Cost: Approximately \$1.1 million

That the ACT Government increase Youth Services Program funding by 25% to meet increasing demand and unmet need of young people and their families in the ACT.

Recommendation 30

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government, as a matter of urgency, implement recommendations outlined in the ACT Council of Social Service report, *Finding Solutions, Towards the long term viability of the ACT Community Sector*.

Recommendation 31

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government provide further increases to community sector wages to address the significant disparity between the ACT Public Service and the community sector for positions with similar responsibilities and duties.

Recommendation 32

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government fund the further development of a Code of Ethics for youth work in the ACT.

3. Mental Health

Mental Health is defined in the *National Mental Health Plan 2003 – 2008* as:

*A state of emotional and social wellbeing in which the individual can cope with the normal stresses of life and achieve his or her potential. It is not simply the absence of mental illness.*⁵

According to the Mental Health Council of Australia, 70% of mental health issues manifest between the ages of 15 and 25, with early intervention increasing the chances of recovery for these young people.⁶ Mental health issues are also likely to affect more than one quarter of young people aged 18 - 25 in any given 12 month period.⁷

This highlights the importance of developing early intervention and prevention strategies with young people; and the valuable placement of youth services that work with young people. The Youth Coalition is pleased with the development of the *Four Stage Developmental Model* in the draft *ACT Mental Health Services Plan 2008 - 2013*, in which young people are highlighted as a key target group who warrant unique, targeted strategies.

The Youth Coalition acknowledges the ACT Government's recent investment of funds into community-based mental health services for young people. We also support the ACT Government Election commitment to allocate 12% of the health budget to mental health by 2012.⁸ However, this raises the importance of building on existing mental health initiatives to ensure early intervention and prevention strategies are developed and implemented.

3.1 Youth Sector Representation in Mental Health Policy and Service Development, Implementation and Evaluation

The Youth Coalition supports the ACT Government's commitment to consulting with key stakeholders, including carers, consumers and the non-government sector, particularly in relation to the development of the *ACT Mental Health Services Plan 2008 - 2013*; and the ACT Government Election commitment to establish a *Ministerial Council on Mental Health*.⁹

However, we are disappointed that youth services were not actively involved in the development of the draft *ACT Mental Health Services Plan 2008 – 2013* as evidenced by the stakeholder list at the end of the document.

It is vital that the youth sector has a seat at the table so as to share expertise; develop, promote and implement early intervention and prevention strategies; and to facilitate the inclusion of young people and youth services views, issues and strategies.

Recommendation 1

Cost: Nil

That the ACT Government guarantee there is youth sector representation in the development, implementation and evaluation of the *ACT Mental Health Services Plan 2008 – 2013*; contributes to the *Ministerial Council on Mental Health*; and other key mental health representational activities.

3.2 Mental Health Prevention and Early Intervention

The Youth Coalition calls on the ACT Government to allocate targeted resources to the early intervention and prevention of mental health issues in young people.

The Youth Coalition acknowledges the need to allocate resources to acute services in the ACT, and appreciates the challenges of balancing the provision of funding across mental health. However, the effectiveness of promotion, prevention and early intervention has been highlighted through research and evaluation in addition to the cost effective nature of these programs.¹⁰

In line with the ACT Government's election commitment to providing additional funds to increase the focus on early intervention and prevention,¹¹ the Youth Coalition strongly supports the development and implementation of these programs and their continued expansion in a range of settings, including youth services.

Recommendation 2

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government fulfils its election commitment to provide increased funding for programs that focus on early intervention and prevention in a range of settings, including youth services.

3.3 Young People with Eating Disorders

Eating disorders are psychological disorders characterised by dieting and thoughts of body shape and weight becoming a distressing focus of one's life. Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia and Binge Eating Disorder are the most commonly recognised forms of eating disorders. All of these have serious physical and mental health implications.¹²

Young people are the group most commonly at risk of experiencing eating disorders,¹³ with approximately 2% of young women suffering from an eating disorder.¹⁴

In November 2008, the Youth Coalition hosted a consultation for the *Review of Services for People with Eating Disorders*. This consultation highlighted difficulties for young people in accessing treatment and support for eating disorders, with many young people unable to find appropriate treatment in the ACT. The effects become accumulative as young people are forced to travel interstate due to the lack of services in the ACT, which causes delays in accessing treatment and increases the risk of harm.

Recommendation 3

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government ensure the development and implementation of a multidisciplinary response to enable young people with eating disorders to access comprehensive treatment and support through existing services based in the ACT.

See also *Section 4: Alcohol and Other Drugs* and *Section 5: Comorbidity* for interrelated initiatives.

4. Alcohol and Other Drugs

People often experiment with alcohol and other drugs (AOD) when they are young. While the majority of young people do not develop problematic AOD issues, some do.

Alcohol is the most widely used drug in Australia causing significant harm and cost to society. Across Australia, about 90% of students have tried alcohol by the age of 14, and over 70% of young people aged 17 had consumed alcohol within a month of being surveyed.¹⁵

The average age of initiation into illicit drug use is 19 years.¹⁶ Given this, young people should be seen as the primary target group for implementing early intervention and prevention and education strategies to reduce AOD related harm.

In the *Young People and Drug Education Project*, the Youth Coalition also observed that poly-drug use is becoming the norm for many young people in the ACT.¹⁷

4.1 Expand Tertiary Services provided by the Alcohol and Drug Program for Young People under the age of 18

There are few options for young people under the age of 18 years to access tertiary AOD services in the ACT.

The Alcohol and Drug Program, ACT Health, is the primary provider of tertiary AOD services to the Canberra community. Although the ADP does not exclude people under the age of 18 years from accessing its services, it does not provide specific services for this group, outside of young people involved with the criminal justice system. The Diversion Service in the ADP delivers tertiary AOD services to young people who have been apprehended or charged with an AOD related offence.¹⁸

The Youth Coalition calls on the ACT Government to extend the ADP's tertiary AOD services, including counselling and services on an inpatient, outpatient and outreach basis, to young people under the age of 18 years who are not involved in the criminal justice system.

In order to prevent AOD related harm in the Canberra community it is crucial that this group of young people have the same equity to services as the rest of the community.

Recommendation 4

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government expand access to the tertiary services provided by the Alcohol and Drug Program, ACT Health, to young people under the age of 18 years not involved in the criminal justice system.

4.2 Alcohol and Other Drug Education for Young People aged 18 – 25

AOD education is a preventative initiative and traditionally delivered within the school system. The ACT Standing Committee on Health and Disability's report, *The Use of Crystal Methamphetamine 'Ice' in the ACT*, cited the Youth Coalition's paper that the most common time young people start experimenting with AOD is when they leave secondary school and formal education ceases.¹⁹ The report identified young people who have left secondary school education as being a key target group in need of receiving targeted AOD education²⁰.

Outside of the school system, a young person's access to AOD information is limited to the information available through general community awareness campaigns, the media, personal research and experiences, family members and friends, and community services. Accurate information and education outside of the school system is required to ensure young people can take responsibility for their AOD use and make informed decisions, while taking into account the genuine risks associated with their use.

There is a high prevalence of poly-drug use among young people who use alcohol and other drugs. In the Standing Committee's report, the Youth Coalition recommended that information regarding poly-drug use should be included in AOD information and education campaigns.²¹

The Youth Coalition calls for the implementation of the recommendations from the ACT Standing Committee on Health and Disability's report, *The Use of Crystal Methamphetamine 'Ice' in the ACT*, and that the ACT Government fund the development and implementation of a targeted AOD education project for young people aged 18 – 25.

Recommendation 5

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government implement the recommendations from the ACT Standing Committee on Health and Disability's report, *The Use of Crystal Methamphetamine 'Ice' in the ACT*, with priority funding being allocated to:

A community based position to research, develop, design and implement a community education for young people aged 18 – 25 years, that aims to provide factual and relevant information about alcohol and other drug use.

See also Section 3: Mental Health and Section 5: Comorbidity for further interrelated initiatives.

5. Comorbidity

Comorbidity is the co-occurrence of alcohol and other drugs, and mental health issues. A critical period for developing comorbidity is throughout adolescence.²² Although comorbidity affects a range of age groups, young people have been identified as at significant risk of poor treatment outcomes as a result of comorbidity.²³

5.1 Integrated Comorbidity Policy and Services

The draft *ACT Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Strategy 2009 - 2012* and the draft *ACT Mental Health Services Plan 2008 - 2013* are key documents that will guide policy service delivery in the ACT over the ACT Government's term.

These key policy and service delivery documents currently have limited intersection, despite the increasing evidence of consumers with comorbid conditions, and their interaction with both service systems. Through the development and implementation of these key documents, the ACT has a significant opportunity to provide national leadership in developing more integrated service responses.

Recommendation 6

That the ACT Government align the *ACT Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Strategy 2009 - 2012* and the draft *ACT Mental Health Services Plan 2008 - 2013* so as to develop meaningful comorbidity policy and services.

5.2 Align ACT Health Alcohol and Other Drugs and Mental Health Services

The Youth Coalition calls for Mental Health ACT and the Alcohol and Drug Program, both programs of ACT Health, to provide integrated services for young people experiencing comorbidity.

As stated in the draft *ACT Mental Health Services Plan 2008 – 2013*, Mental Health ACT has developed the *Four Life Stages Developmental Model*. This model uses developmental milestones to determine to the most appropriate point of service. This will mean the establishment of separate services for children and young people, and the corresponding realignment of services currently provided.

The Youth Coalition strongly supports the *Four Life Stages Developmental Model* as it recognises the differing support needs of young people under the age of 18, and those aged 18 – 25.

As outlined in Section 4.1, the Alcohol and Drug Program does not provide tertiary AOD services to young people under the age of 18, other than those involved in the criminal justice system. The Youth Coalition calls on the ACT Government to align ACT Health's services through Mental Health ACT and the Alcohol and Drug Program to young people aged 12 - 25.

Recommendation 7

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government align the *Four Stage Developmental Model* across both Mental Health ACT and the Alcohol and Drug Program to provide targeted comorbid support to young people aged 12 – 25 years.

See also *Section 3: Mental Health* and *Section 4: Alcohol and Other Drugs* for further interrelated initiatives.

6. Sexual Health

Sexual health is a key aspect of young people's overall health and wellbeing. The median age of sexual intercourse is currently around 16, with over 25% of Year 10 students and just under 50% of Year 12 students having had sexual intercourse.²⁴ Only 40% of Year 12 students regularly use condoms when having sexual intercourse²⁵, and young people are at an increased risk of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI)²⁶. Therefore, it is vital that young people are informed about sexual health and safe sexual behaviours.

Research suggests that many young people have low levels of knowledge in relation to sexual health. Accurate sexual health information and education within the school system is required so that young people can take responsibility for and make informed decisions about their sexual development.

It is the responsibility of both the ACT Government and the community to address this through increased quality education, information, early intervention and health promotion.

6.1 Targeted Education and Prevention of Chlamydia with Young People

Chlamydia is the most common STI affecting young people²⁷, and its rates of occurrence have risen 20% each year since 1998.²⁸ In 2006, 40 000 cases were reported in Australia.²⁹ Of these, 24 000 people (60%) were aged 15 - 24.³⁰ Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT has reported that Chlamydia affects 1 in 14 young people. However, because Chlamydia is asymptomatic, it is likely many more cases are undiagnosed.

Youth Coalition consultations revealed the need for increased education and prevention amongst young people in regards to Chlamydia. Low levels of knowledge on sexual health issues amongst young people, coupled with increasingly younger ages of sexual activity, is likely to have contributed to the increased occurrence of Chlamydia infections over the past decade.³¹

In the *HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C, Sexually Transmissible Infections Strategic Framework for the ACT 2007 – 2012*, the ACT Government commits to prioritising education and prevention to minimise the spread of STIs.³² The Youth Coalition calls for the ACT Government to uphold this commitment, specifically in regards to Chlamydia.

The Youth Coalition calls for the ACT Government to provide funding to a program that will increase testing for, and awareness of, Chlamydia in young people. A current example of good practice is *Consider This*; a collaborative project between Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT, the Academic Unit of Internal Medicine at the Australian National University, and the Junction Youth Health Service, Anglicare Canberra and Goulburn.

Recommendation 8

That the ACT Government allocate funds towards a program targeted at young people aimed at raising awareness and increasing testing of Chlamydia.

6.2 Sexual Health Promotion and Education

Sexual health promotion and education is important for young people in order to ensure their sexual development is positive and their exposure to risks, such as unwanted pregnancy and the contraction of STIs, is minimised. Studies consistently show that comprehensive and accurate sexual health education leads to a delay in the onset of sexual activity, or a decrease in overall sexual activity. In addition, research shows that sexuality education increases the adoption of safe sex practices by sexually active young people.

Sexual health promotion and education programs need to be inclusive of diverse cultural backgrounds, genders and sexual orientations, to ensure that young people have access to appropriate, relevant, non-judgmental and evidence based material.

Many of the services delivering effective, relevant, and accurate sexual health education to schools and other communities are suffering capacity constraints and are struggling to meet demand.

The Youth Coalition acknowledges that sexual health education is part of the ACT school curriculum. However it is crucial that community-based, skilled specialists are funded to work collaborative with schools to ensure the delivery of quality programs.

Recommendation 9

That the ACT Government provides funding to community-based specialists to work with schools to deliver evidence-based sexual health promotion and education.

7. Health Services for Young People

Health services in the ACT can often be inaccessible to the whole community, with a shortage of general practitioners and the lowest bulk-billing rates in Australia. Young people face an increased range of barriers to accessing health services, including cost, discrimination, lack of transport options, a general unawareness that services exist, confidentiality concerns and possible stigma. Efforts need to be made to overcome these barriers, and youth services have a crucial role to play.

Youth services plays a key role in facilitating access to health services through partnerships and referrals. Those who work with young people are well placed to recognise the needs of young people who experience systemic disadvantage in their access to quality health care, and are often involved in programs and initiatives that aim to rectify this.

The Youth Coalition has been advocating for the development of a *Youth Health Network*, encompassing mental health, alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, comorbidity, sexual health and primary health. The *Youth Health Network* would look at the health needs of young people, examine the coordination of the health system, and find ways to work within the existing system to improve health outcomes for young people. It would build on existing services, such as the Junction Youth Health Service, and would support existing community-based services to access mainstream health services and ensure young people are a key target group in the ACT.

Recommendation 10

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government fund a community-based *Youth Health Network* to collaboratively improve access to and health services for young people.

8. Housing and Homelessness

Appropriate, stable, affordable and safe housing options remain among the highest priorities for young people in the ACT. Young people are affected by the lack of public housing and discrimination in the rental market, examples of broader structural and systemic causes of youth homelessness. It is estimated that youth homelessness accounts for nearly 50% of all homelessness in Australia.³³ Youth homelessness can affect physical and mental health, educational outcomes, access to services, increase the risk of physical and sexual violence, and increase the likelihood of involvement with the justice system.

There are three types of homelessness defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, including primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness. The majority of young people experiencing homelessness fall into secondary and tertiary homelessness categories.³⁴

Primary homelessness refers to people who are living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting in derelict buildings or using cars or trains as temporary shelter. Secondary homelessness refers to young people living in Supported Accommodation Assistance Programs (SAAP) accommodation, hostels, couch-surfing, people staying with other households who have no home of their own and people staying in boarding houses for 12 weeks or less. Tertiary homelessness refers to those living in boarding houses on a medium to long term basis (more than 13 weeks), or those who live in accommodation that does not have 'self-contained facilities'.

8.1 Addressing Homelessness for Young People aged 12 – 14

There is an urgent gap in housing options for young people aged 12 – 14 years with 26% of homeless young people in this age group³⁵. The Youth Coalition calls for the ACT Government to address this as a matter of urgency.

Supported Accommodation Assistance Programs (SAAP) cannot be accessed by young people under the age of 15, with young people aged 12 – 14 generally falling under the jurisdiction of Care and Protection Services in the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (DHCS). At present, Care and Protection accommodation services, such as Marlow Cottage, are only available to young people under a Care and Protection Order. Homelessness, or being at-risk of experiencing homelessness, is insufficient grounds for being granted an order.

Currently, DHCS does not have any agreements or partnerships with related agencies or services regarding accommodation for young people in this age-group.³⁶ This is in sharp contrast to agencies in other Australian States (with the exception of the Northern Territory), which have formal and non-formal agreements, partnerships and Memoranda of Understanding with Government Departments, agencies, housing providers, community sector services and other important stakeholders.³⁷ Notably, South Australia and Victoria are developing coordinated plans aimed at meeting service gaps for young people in this age group.³⁸

The Youth Coalition calls more a more coordinated approach to addressing homelessness for young people aged 12 – 14 years.

Recommendation 11

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government immediately develop and implement strategies with youth and related services to address homelessness for young people aged 12 - 14 as a matter of urgency.

8.2 Development of a New *Youth Homelessness Action Plan*

The *Youth Homelessness Action Plan* has been a highly successful collaboration between the ACT Government and the community and youth sectors. It has helped to build partnerships between the community sector and the Government, and has seen the implementation of a number of important initiatives, including the development and implementation of the *Housing Young People Pilot*, the *Youth Supported Accommodation Assistance Programs (YSAAP) Protocol*, improved exit points for young people leaving supported accommodation and making Housing ACT properties available to the community sector.

The Youth Coalition commends the ACT Government for these initiatives, which include, for example:

- the establishment of the two new Youth Housing Managers, in Housing ACT, in helping homeless or at-risk young people to navigate the housing system; and
- the development of the *YSAAP Protocol*, which is an important collaboration between the ACT Government and the community sector, and provides guidance in a number of circumstances, including collaborative case management, information exchange and identification of service needs and gaps.

The *Youth Homelessness Action Plan* expires at the end of 2008. The development of a new plan will mark the ACT Government's new term with strategies to implement a comprehensive, holistic response to housing and homelessness for young people.

It is important that the next *Youth Homelessness Action Plan* be developed with young people, youth services and in conjunction with national responses, given the renewed national focus on housing and homelessness issues and the upcoming release of the Australian Government White Paper on Homelessness. National initiatives will affect the YSAAP sector in the ACT, and are also likely to impact on funding and administrative arrangements in housing services and programs. It is important that any major changes at the national level are factored in to ACT Government planning.

Recommendation 12

Cost: Nil

That the ACT Government develop a new *Youth Homelessness Action Plan* as a collaborative partnership with young people, youth and community sectors, and in conjunction with national initiatives.

8.3 Implementing a Kids Under Cover Model

Strong and positive family relationships are associated with good outcomes for young people.³⁹ It is important that young people at risk of homelessness are supported to stay connected with their families or other support networks where appropriate. This relieves the burden on housing services and the YSAAP system, keeps families and support networks together and may prevent homelessness.

An example of a program that has successfully applied this model is Victorian community organisation *Kids Under Cover*, which aims to support young people to stay connected with family, school and community, and prevent homelessness. By raising funds to construct purpose-built houses and demountable bungalows on family properties, young people are able to continue living with their families, but are given their own space and a degree of personal independence. Young people living in *Kids Under Cover* accommodation are offered the opportunity to pursue their educational and training goals, through the provision of financial and mentoring support.

In Victoria, the program has become financially self-sufficient, securing recurrent funding from philanthropic trusts, foundations, and the business and legal sectors. For the Victorian Government, it has proven to be an inexpensive investment that has relieved considerable burden from the Government and community sectors.

The Youth Coalition calls for the ACT Government to immediately ratify its commitment to provide initial funding to implement a *Kids Under Cover* model.

Recommendation 13

Cost: \$100,000

That the ACT Government allocate \$100,000 funding to establish a service similar to the *Kids Under Cover* model in the ACT.

8.4 Housing for Newly Arrived Young People

Newly arrived young people are six to ten times more likely to become homeless than other young people, and are particularly at risk of homelessness.⁴⁰

In the ACT, newly arrived young people and refugees are not permitted to access public housing for six months after arrival. Young people who may have been able to support their own tenancies then often become homeless due to lack of access. This can lead to more complex problems, such as restricted access to social networks, poverty, economic isolation and cyclical chronic homelessness.⁴¹

The *ACT Multicultural Strategy 2006 – 2009* reaffirms the Government's obligation to provide essential service to those seeking refuge in the ACT.⁴² Better provision of flexible options for these young people will alleviate housing stress and ease the other pressures on refugee families integrating into the Canberra community.

By building flexibility into the current public housing system and reviewing social housing options, the ACT would be moving closer in line with other Australian states and territories such as NSW, who have made tangible commitments and implemented strategies to enable newly arrived tenants to access a range of housing options.

Recommendation 14

Cost: Nil

That the ACT Government waives the six-month waiting period applied to newly arrived and refugee housing applicants.

See also Section 11: Multicultural Young People for further interrelated initiatives.

8.5 Strategies to Increase the Supply of Public Housing

In recent years, the ACT Government has made significant changes to public housing in the ACT in an attempt to increase the provision of housing to those most in need. However, the heart of the issue is that there are not enough properties in Housing ACT. After years for calling for a greater investment, the Youth Coalition is pleased that the ACT Government has adopted the target of 10% public housing stock.

Young people are continually over-represented in figures highlighting housing stress.⁴³ The private rental market in the ACT is the most competitive and difficult to access, with rent rates in the ACT the highest of all the major capital cities.⁴⁴ High average incomes for some ACT residents distort figures of affordability, and the disparities are easily overlooked.

The inaccessibility of the private market for young people further highlights the need for a robust public housing sector. Public housing is a key exit point for young people in the SAAP system, but long waiting lists lead to difficult transitions. Additionally, young people who may not have traditionally entered the SAAP system are now doing so because public housing is difficult to access.

Increasing the supply of public housing is therefore both necessary given the demand, and is in the long term best interest of the ACT Government and those living in the ACT.

Recommendation 15

Cost: \$10m (over four years)

a. That the ACT Government fulfill its target of 10% public housing stock by 2012, and that capital injections into Housing ACT are made over the next four budgets to increase supply.

b. That the ACT Government seek additional funds from the Australian Government to support strategies to increase the supply of public housing.

9. Justice

The philosophy that underpins youth justice in the ACT is:

*To assist 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.*⁴⁵

The ACT youth justice system recognises that young people in detention have differing needs to those in the adult correctional system. To reflect this, jurisdictional responsibility for youth justice lies within the Office of Children, Youth and Family Support (OCYFS) in the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (DHCS), as opposed to ACT Corrective Services in Department of Justice and Community Safety (JCS).

257 young people went through the youth justice system in the ACT in 2006-07.⁴⁶ This figure encompasses young people in detention, young people in community supervision and young people in youth justice supervision. Of these, about 80% were aged 10-17 years.⁴⁷ From 2009, young people will be detained in the Bimberi Youth Justice Centre (Bimberi).

Bimberi is the new youth custodial facility located in Mitchell, replacing the Quamby Youth Detention Centre, and is the first youth custodial facility in Australia to be designed, built and operated under Human Rights legislation.⁴⁸ Bimberi can accommodate up to 40 young people aged from 10-18 years, as well as some young people up to the age of 21.⁴⁹

9.1 Equity in Health Services for Young People at Bimberi Youth Justice Centre

The 2008/09 ACT Government Budget allocated over \$4 million over four years to an initiative to provide for a high quality correctional health model for the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC). The purpose of this initiative is to provide health services equal to those available in the general community, based on individual need. These are important initiatives, and the Youth Coalition supports health equity for Canberra's prison population.

Given the ACT's obligations under the Human Rights Act, Bimberi Youth Justice Centre (Bimberi) detainees must be able to access health care of the same quality as that available in the general population.⁵⁰ It is important to ensure that there is parity in age appropriate services, resources, expertise and support available to young people in Bimberi relative to those of young people in the community.

Recommendation 16

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government ensure that there is equity of access to age appropriate health services and expertise for young people in Bimberi Youth Justice Centre as those in the general community.

9.2 Initiatives for Young People Leaving the Alexander Maconochie Centre

The 2008/09 ACT Government Budget allocated \$10 million over four years for the development of new programs for detainees at the Alexander Maconochie Centre in preparation for their release. This includes planning for supported accommodation, living skills training and employment and skills training. The Youth Coalition commends the ACT Government for the development of this initiative, and strongly supports the development of comprehensive exit plans for prisoners exiting detention. It is important that these initiatives include specific and targeted initiatives for young people aged 18 – 25 years.

Recommendation 17

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government ensures programs for detainees in the Alexander Maconochie Centre include specific and targeted initiatives for young people aged 18 – 25 years.

9.3 Initiatives for Young People Leaving Bimberi Youth Justice Centre

Following the previous recommendation, it is imperative that this commitment extends to young people being released from Bimberi who must have pre-planned exits from detention and services responsible for and accountable to supporting them upon their release. This planning should include strategies aiming to establish relationships with services prior to release, identify clear handover and follow up, accountability, and engage and support families where appropriate.

Given the over-representation of young people who have left detention in homelessness statistics,⁵¹ particular attention in the development of these programs needs to be paid to securing safe and stable housing options. It is also important to ensure there are support mechanisms in place to assist young people to live independently.

Recommendation 18

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government develop programs with the youth and community sector to ensure the implementation of individual, planned and supported exits for young people exiting the Bimberi Youth Justice Centre, including planning for supported accommodation, living skills training and employment and skills training.

10. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures hold a unique and important place in the Canberra community and Australian society. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people face systemic disadvantage, discrimination and continue to be affected by actions of the past. As a result, closing the gap in life expectancy, literacy and numeracy, employment and health between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is a national and ACT priority.

Despite this, Indigenous young people continue to be over-represented in many indicators of risk. Additionally, for some Indigenous people, participation in education is affected by economic disadvantage, social marginalisation, health problems and geographical isolation. A lack of formal education has implications for future employment prospects and economic independence of young people and their families.⁵²

In 2006, it was estimated that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in the ACT was 4,300, with a median age of 21 years.⁵³ Given this, policies and programs need to be focused on this unique population structure, and on Indigenous young people and families if any headway is to be made in addressing inequity.

The Youth Coalition commends the ACT Government on measures that have been taken in recent years to promote social inclusion and “close the gap”, including the establishment of an elected Indigenous representative body and support for literacy and numeracy programs for Indigenous children. However, more needs to be done to ensure that the ACT’s long-term vision and commitment to achieve measurable change in the health and family wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT is successfully met.

Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation

Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation (Gugan Gulwan) has been operating successfully for many years as the only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth centre in the ACT. Gugan Gulwan provides a range of services for young people and their families including support, education, information, referral and advocacy. Gugan Gulwan has developed a range of effective programs for working with Indigenous young people across the ACT and this has highlighted the importance of Indigenous youth centres in providing culturally appropriate and effective programs for Indigenous young people and their families.

In light of the systemic disadvantage that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to face, the Youth Coalition is again calling on the ACT Government to make the meagre contribution of \$140 000 to the three recommendations outlined below. This funding will increase Gugan Gulwan’s capacity to meet increased demand including providing outreach to Indigenous young people.

10.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Centre

Implicit in the *ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Family Wellbeing Plan 2006-2011* is the intention that existing health and wellbeing services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT region will continue to be

delivered and further developed.⁵⁴ Additional funding could be used by Gugan Gulwan to meet the current gaps they experience, contribute to increased capacity at their Erindale centre, provide Indigenous young people in the north of the ACT with a safe space to speak with youth workers and other professionals and implement early intervention and prevention programs designed to reduce the instances of risk factors in Indigenous young people in the ACT.

Recommendation 19

Cost: \$75,000 (recurrent)

That the ACT Government urgently provide recurrent core funding to Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation to enable it to meet the increasing demand from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the ACT.

10.2 Indigenous Alternative Education Program

The Youth Coalition has been calling for a small amount of funding to support the Indigenous Alternative Education Program at Gugan Gulwan for a number of years. While the Youth Coalition is pleased with the ACT Government 2008-2009 Budget allocation of \$3.8 million over four years to literacy and numeracy initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, we are again disappointed that less than 1% of the allocated money could not be allocated to fund this very inexpensive and highly effective program.

The program is currently funded by the Community Inclusion Fund with funding set to cease in early 2009, resulting in the discontinuation of the program; and subsequent disengagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people from the education program that has been supporting them.

The ACT Government has repeatedly stated its commitment to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to achieve their potential. Despite this, statistics in a wide range of studies reveal that, despite some encouraging signs towards slowing or reversing these trends, the education gap remains one of the most critical problems facing Aboriginal people in Australia.⁵⁵

The *Numeracy and Literacy Program* has been provided by Gugan Gulwan for a number of years and was developed to meet the needs of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (aged 12 - 18 years) who otherwise would not be able to complete studies successfully at a mainstream schooling institution. This program is delivered two days a week and has funded a teacher to coordinate the delivery, curriculum, integration and organisation of educational services and programs.

A recent external evaluation of the program found it is of high quality and makes a valuable contribution to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the ACT.⁵⁶ The Youth Coalition supports the recommendation that calls for the program to be provided with ongoing funding through local pools to ensure its sustainability into the future. Continued funding will enable a teacher and education activities to continue to be provided to Indigenous young people.

Recommendation 20

Cost: \$35,000 (recurrent)

That the ACT Government urgently provide \$35,000 in recurrent funding to Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation to continue their Indigenous Alternative Education Program.

10.3 Indigenous Support Groups

As part of their high quality and effective service delivery, Gugan Gulwan is currently providing a Young Men's Mentor Group, a Young Women's Mentor Group and a Young Mum's Group. To date, each of these groups have been relying on in-kind support from external agencies. This support is not sustainable, and each of these groups is therefore at serious risk of having to be abandoned. If funding is not received approximately 60 at-risk Indigenous young people will no longer be able to access the innovative support groups they have been benefiting from.

A small budget allocation of \$30,000, which equates to \$500 per young person, will ensure the continuation of the very effective and meaningful support groups for over 60 Indigenous young people in Canberra.

Each of these programs assist Indigenous young people to access a safe space to speak with youth workers and other professionals. Through these programs, youth workers and other professionals have the opportunity to implement early intervention and prevention strategies designed to reduce the instances of risk factors in Indigenous young people in the ACT. Continued funding would ensure that the support being provided to Indigenous young people is able to continue and will assist in reducing the significant disadvantage experienced by many Indigenous young people in the ACT.

Recommendation 21

Cost: \$30,000 (recurrent)

That the ACT Government urgently provide \$30,000 in recurrent funding to Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation to run their Young Men's Mentor Group, Young Women's Mentor Group and Young Mum's Group.

11. Multicultural Young People

Cultural diversity is a proud and prominent feature of Canberra. It was recently estimated that 32 700 people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds live in Canberra.⁵⁷

Over the past decade, there has been a marked increase in the proportion of people aged under 30 years, arriving through Australia's Humanitarian Program,⁵⁸ with young people accounting for 38.3% of the ACT's total humanitarian entrants between 2002 and 2007.⁵⁹ These young people may have been exposed to extreme poverty, conflict and violence in their country of origin, and many will have spent time in transit in other countries or in refugee camps where life is unpredictable, physically difficult and sometimes violent.⁶⁰

The impact of these experiences, including significant effects on psychological wellbeing, family relationships, and on adapting to a new environment, will continue for young people as they are settling in the ACT. These experiences are further complicated by experiencing similar issues to other young people around housing and homelessness, health, education and employment, lack of recreational opportunities, and family and peer relationships.⁶¹

Limited multicultural and settlement services are available in the ACT. Community consultations for the *ACT Multicultural Strategy 2006 - 2009* found that young refugees and newly arrived young people have specific needs and are particularly affected by settlement, and identified the lack of programs to support young people.⁶²

The ACT Government has stated that all migrants should be able to gain access to targeted essential services and programs; and committed to providing the full range of essential settlement services, such as housing, transport, education, work experience programs, counselling and orientation assistance for newly arrived migrants.⁶³

The ACT Government's 2008 election commitments to multicultural young people included:

- Funding a campaign in the multicultural community to reduce community stigma associated with mental health issues experienced by young people;
- Funding a program to assist refugees in our community with living skills;
- Funding a campaign to increase awareness of consumer protection among multicultural youth to reduce exploitation and debt levels;
- Funding an orientation program for multicultural youth to learn about Australia's legal system with an emphasis on road use; and,
- Establishing a program to assist young multicultural women to understand their identity in the context of a cross-cultural environment.⁶⁴

The allocation of resources to the recommendations below will support the ACT Government to meet these election commitments.

11.1 Multicultural Youth Services

This is the fifth budget submission in which the Youth Coalition has called on the ACT Government to provide recurrent funding for Multicultural Youth Services (MYS). The Community Inclusion Board currently funds \$80,000 to MYS to provide essential services to multicultural young people in the ACT. This funding ceases in June 2009, which will result in the closure of their drop-in service.

MYS is the only youth specific service in the ACT for refugee, newly arrived and multicultural young people. The service is a specialised organisation with a high degree of organisational knowledge and skill in working with multicultural young people. MYS has been repeatedly recognised for their practice and importance, winning an *ACT Early Intervention Award* (2006), an *ACTCOSS Diversity Award* (2008) and a *Yogie Award for Excellence in Organisational Practice* (2008).

Multicultural young people and their families, as well as mainstream and multicultural services, rely on being able to access, work with and refer to MYS. MYS currently has three youth workers. At present, each worker has 63 young people in their client load, demonstrating the demand for service and the unsustainable workload.

The closure of this service will result in a significant gap in service provision and the loss of support to multicultural young people, whom the ACT Government has stated its strong commitment to and acknowledges as a particularly vulnerable group in our community.⁶⁵

The Youth Coalition calls on the ACT Government to maintain the current funding of \$80,000 to enable the service to continue to provide essential support such as case management, drop in, brokerage and resettlement assistance. Additional funding of \$70,000 will assist the service to meet unmet demand and respond to emerging issues, to provide support to other mainstream services to work with multicultural young people and increased capacity to respond to current issues.

Recommendation 22

Cost: \$150,000 (recurrent)

That the ACT Government urgently fund Multicultural Youth Services \$150 000 recurrently to provide essential services and support to refugee, newly arrived and multicultural young people in the ACT.

11.2 Emerging Need: Young Burmese Refugees

Australia has recognised the significant humanitarian needs of the people of Burma.⁶⁶ In 2007-08, Australia granted 2961 humanitarian visas to Burmese refugees and it is expected that Burmese people will continue to be one of the largest groups of entrants under Australia's humanitarian program for 2008-09.⁶⁷

There are increasing numbers of Burmese refugees, particularly from the Mon, Karen and Chin minority ethnic groups, are settling in the ACT. Humanitarian entrants born in Burma rose to around 14% of entrants to the ACT in 2006-07 from around 8% over the previous five years, reflecting the shifting composition of Australia's Humanitarian Program.⁶⁸

Youth Coalition consultations have revealed that young Burmese refugees are a particularly isolated group whose needs are not currently being met. We call on the

ACT Government to take proactive measures to demonstrate its commitment to refugees by allocating resources to ensure that culturally appropriate and youth specific services are provided for this emerging target group.

Recommendation 23

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government allocate targeted resources to support young Burmese refugees and their families.

11.3 Multicultural Youth Network

Over the past six months, over 80 cross-sectoral individuals and services in the ACT have been involved in the development of a *Multicultural Youth Network* to seek to coordinate and connect resources for multicultural young people and their families. The foundational work has included stakeholder identification, a planning day, a stakeholder database, a workplan, two multicultural youth forums, a training day and a newsletter. However, this work cannot continue without allocated resources by the ACT Government.

The *Multicultural Youth Network* would improve supports for multicultural young people, strengthen multicultural youth services (locally and nationally) and raise the profile of multicultural youth issues in the ACT. Network activities would aim to:

- Connect and coordinate of youth multicultural resources in the ACT;
- Build the capacity of mainstream services to become 'youth multicultural' competent;
- Map services and develop a directory;
- Provide opportunities for collaborations and partnerships;
- Distribute information and resources; and
- Promote training and professional development opportunities.

Recommendation 24

Cost: \$40,000 (recurrent)

That the ACT Government fund \$40,000 for the secretariat and project management support for a *Multicultural Youth Network* in the ACT

12. Youth Sector

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

Community based youth services continue to face increasingly complex issues; time-consuming client loads; and insufficient funding for workforce development, recruitment and retention of workers within the sector. These increasing demands on youth services highlight the importance of the sector being appropriately resourced to meet the needs of young people in the ACT.

The wage disparity between community and government means the community sector is less able to attract qualified staff as the remuneration services can offer is well below that of government.

Career pathways are limited in the youth sector, with few opportunities to advance in positions of direct service provision. This forces many frontline workers into management positions or out of the sector entirely, considerably undermining the corporate knowledge of the sector. As such, the youth sector continues to experience pressure in recruiting and retaining fully qualified and/or trained workers.

The myriad of issues impacting on the viability of the youth and broader community sector are outlined in the ACT Council of Social Service report, *Finding Solutions: Towards the long term viability of the ACT Community Sector*. The Youth Coalition of the ACT strongly supports all of the recommendations outlined within the report.

The ACT Government has made a commitment to increase resources for systems that seek to protect children and young people in Canberra. The Youth Coalition commends progress that has been made by the ACT Government including committing to the re-establishment of the Community Engagement Unit within the Chief Ministers Department by June 2009, and a review of community sector contracts over the next 18 months. However, given the increased outsourcing by ACT Government to the community sector, these issues must be addressed as a matter of urgency for the youth sector to continue to develop, to become part of a cohesive and viable community sector in the ACT.

Developing an Evidence Base for Youth Service Delivery

It is crucial 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. The following four recommendations all contribute to developing the policy context and evidence base upon which youth services are delivered in the ACT.

12.1 Evaluating the Youth Services Program

The 2002 Review of the Youth Services Program (YSP) called for an independent evaluation of the YSP, since then YSP services have been calling for the evaluation to be conducting. Despite the ACT Government's commitment to conducting, and to absorbing the costs, the evaluation has not yet been completed.

The ACT Government has commenced the process of YSP contract negotiations, which expire in 2010. The Youth Coalition has serious concerns that a program wide evaluation is not underpinning these negotiations. This is further compounded by Recommendation 26 which states that the ACT Young People's Plan has expired.

Recommendation 25

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government uphold its commitment and immediately conduct an independent evaluation of the Youth Services Program to examine areas of unmet need and emerging issues and to inform Youth Services Program contract negotiations and youth policy development.

12.2 Development of a New *Young People's Plan*

The purpose of the *Young People's Plan* was to provide a flexible and responsive context for government agencies, community organisations, the ACT community and young people to support improved outcomes for young people and address changing needs and emerging priorities over the period 2004 - 2008⁶⁹. This Plan has now expired.

A new *Young People's Plan* urgently needs to be developed with young people, youth services and key stakeholders so as to provide a policy context for public sector agencies when developing policy advice and initiatives relating to young people. Previously the *Young People's Plan* was intended to be used by individuals, groups and organisations that work at all levels with young people and on issues affecting young people.

Recommendation 26

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government immediately develop a new *Young People's Plan* with young people, youth services and key stakeholders to guide whole of government policy and services relating to young people.

12.3 Social and Demographic Profile of Young People in the ACT

The Youth Coalition calls 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.

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.

Therefore, the Youth Coalition calls for a new profile to be developed updating the statistics used in this document with, for example, the 2006 Census Data to ensure that the ACT Government and community sector is able to use the best possible data when making decisions about service provision to young people in the ACT.

Recommendation 27

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government develop an updated social and demographic profile of young people in the ACT.

12.4 Youth Centres Modelling Project

There are nine multi functioning youth centres in the ACT and surrounding region. Youth centres provide safe, youth friendly spaces where young people can access a range of programs and activities. Youth Centres are often the first point of contact for young people accessing the service system, meaning that they are generalist services that can act as a gateway to other services.

Youth centres work with young people aged 12 – 25 years which is not a homogenous group. The diversity amongst this group is as diverse as that in the broader population. Furthermore the issues affecting, and the needs, of young people are changing all the time. Therefore it is crucial that youth centres have the capacity to adapt to the changing needs of their client group and are routinely reflecting on their practice.

The *Youth Centres Network* is a mechanism that the youth centres have developed to facilitate their on-going improvement and to develop strategies to respond to the challenges they experience daily.

The *Youth Centres Modelling Project* was developed as part of the *Youth Centres Network* to research existing youth centres models and practices to provide youth centres in the ACT and Queanbeyan with an evidence base upon which to improve their practice.

Significant work has taken place over 2008, including policy and procedure manual reviews, literature searches, and practice and models documentation. However the Project is not able to progress without consultancy support.

Recommendation 28

Cost: \$10 000

That the ACT Government fund \$10,000 towards the Youth Centres Modelling Project for youth centres to access consultancy services further develop their practice.

Youth Sector Development and Viability

The service system set up to support young people must be viable and able to further develop to address emerging issues and provide targeted support to young people. The following four recommendations will all contribute to building the viability and capacity of services to work with young people and their families.

12.5 Increasing Youth Services Program Capacity

The Youth Services Program (YSP) should be increased by 25% to resource it to respond to new and emerging needs and to assist in reorientating in response to the YSP Evaluation that the ACT Government has committed to conduct.

YSP services have been experiencing demand that significantly outstrips their capacity to provide services and have been experiencing this over a prolonged period of time.

The number of young people accessing YSP services has increased significantly since the programs original funding and this is reflected in the reporting submitted by YSP services every six months. There are also significant gaps in service provision that are also constantly highlighted by services. There will likely be areas of unmet need that require examination through the YSP Evaluation and action through the YSP.

It is clear from this evaluation there will be a process of reorientation of some services to meet some of the current unmet demand however this will not solve the problem of a limited capacity within the YSP services to actively respond to emerging needs and issues.

Any changes of focus must be met with additional funding, not within existing funding. To reorientate services without any replacement services will be highly detrimental to the young people that are currently supported through these programs.

The Youth Coalition calls for the ACT Government to recognise the increased demand and unmet need and address this issue by increasing the YSP funding by 25%, or approximately \$1.1 million. It is important to note that YSP contracts expire in 2010.

Recommendation 29

Cost: Approximately \$1.1 million

That the ACT Government increase Youth Services Program funding by 25% to meet increasing demand and unmet need of young people and their families in the ACT.

12.6 Youth Sector Viability

The Youth Coalition implores the ACT Government to consider, as a matter of urgency, each of the 30 recommendations outlined in the ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS) report, *Finding Solutions: Towards the long term viability of the ACT Community Sector*.

The report presents the findings from the *ACTCOSS Community Sector Viability Project*, which explored options for securing the long-term viability of the community sector in the ACT. The report outlines priority actions that have been identified by ACTCOSS and many community partners as a way forward to secure the future of the community sector in the ACT. These priorities include actions that can be taken by organisations, by the community sector and by government.⁷⁰

Recommendation 30

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government, as a matter of urgency, implement recommendations outlined in the ACT Council of Social Service report, *Finding Solutions, Towards the long term viability of the ACT Community Sector*.

12.7 Review of Community Sector Contracts

The Youth Coalition supports the ACT Government's commitment to review community sector contracts over the next 18 months to ensure that staff wages and conditions are adequate. Additionally, the review will seek to develop a funding strategy to address identified needs.

The youth and community sectors have been unable to compete with the increases of public sector wages and continue to experience a significant disparity between what they are able to pay staff and the remuneration that the ACT Public Service can offer.

The Community Sector Taskforce's report stated that community sector workers do not have incremental advances to the extent that are provided by the ACT Public Service and as such, positions with similar duties and responsibilities can vary by up to \$20,000.⁷¹

Wage disparity also has flow-on effects within the community sector with 41% of organisations reporting difficulty in attracting appropriate staff due to poor remuneration. Community sector organisations also have difficulty in retaining staff, with a staff turnover rate of 30.7% - double the national average for community sector organisations in Australia.⁷² These barriers leave community sector organisations with inadequate staffing due to the difficulty in replacing staff and unable to retain corporate knowledge within organisations and within the sector.

These problems are significant and have a clear and concerning impact on the way in which the community sector is able to deliver services. Community sector organisations cannot deliver high quality programs and services with staff shortages, high turnovers and an inability to attract suitably qualified or experienced workers. The low wages in the community sector therefore reduce the capacity of the community sector to provide high quality programs and services to the ACT community.

Recommendation 31

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government provide further increases to community sector wages to address the significant disparity between the ACT Public Service and the community sector for positions with similar responsibilities and duties.

12.8 Youth Work Code of Ethics

The Youth Coalition of the ACT has been conducting the *Ethics of Youth Work Project* since late 2007. The Project aims to advance understanding of, and good practice in, youth work; and has examined questions concerned with the nature, values and goals of youth work; and how practice might best be made accountable to these.

Dr Dean Cocking, an expert in professional ethics, and the Youth Coalition of the ACT, the peak body for youth affairs in the ACT, have been conducting the Project. Several workshops, seminars and lectures were conducted with youth services throughout 2008, including the *Professional Ethics and Youth Work Symposium* in December.

Considerable progress has been made and the Project is unique and is able to place the ACT on the map regarding this crucial area of work. However, unfortunately resources for the Project have expired.

Following the symposium youth services stated that they wanted to continue to improved their practice through the Project and that the ACT Government should be lobbied for funding so that this crucial initiative can continue.

Recommendation 32

Cost: Variable

That the ACT Government fund the further development of a Code of Ethics for youth work in the ACT.

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