



**SUBMISSION TO THE
ACT BUDGET 2018-19**

October 2017

WWW.YOUTHCOALITION.NET

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

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

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

Submission to the *ACT Budget 2018-19*
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October 2017

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The Youth Coalition acknowledges the ongoing support and input of the ACT Peaks Network, in particular our partnership work with Families ACT, Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT, Mental Health Community Coalition ACT, ACT Shelter, The Women's Centre for Health Matters, and the ACT Council of Social Services.

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1. Background

Section 1 of this submission provides contextual information about the Youth Coalition of the ACT, young people in the ACT, the youth sector in the ACT, and the process for developing this submission.

Youth Coalition of the ACT

The Youth Coalition is the peak youth affairs body in the ACT. As a membership based organisation, the Youth Coalition is responsible for representing and promoting the rights, interests and well-being of the estimated 78,000 young Canberrans aged 12-25 years and those who work with them.

The general activities of the Youth Coalition fall under four key themes: policy; sector development; advocacy and representation; and projects that respond to ongoing and current issues.

A key role of the Youth Coalition is the development and analysis of ACT social policy and program decisions that affect young people and youth services. The Youth Coalition facilitates the development of strong links and promotes collaboration between the community, government and private sectors to achieve better outcomes for young people in the ACT.

Young People in the ACT

Young people represent more than 20% of Canberra's population, with over 78, 000 people aged 12 - 24¹ residing in the ACT. Young people are a distinct population group aged between 12 and 25 years. Although diverse, as a group young people frequently experience systemic disadvantage, discrimination and unequal access to resources. This means that young people who experience other forms of disadvantage, such as poverty or low educational attainment, are amongst the most vulnerable members of the ACT community.

With over one fifth of Canberra's population aged between 12 and 25, it is important that the well-being of young people be regarded as an indicator of the ACT's future population health and development.

The Youth Sector in the ACT

The youth sector in the ACT is both diverse and unique in its composition and delivery of services to young people aged between 12 and 25, and their families. A range of professionals work within the youth sector, including generalist youth workers, specialist youth workers, health workers, mental health workers, alcohol and other drug workers, social workers, counsellors, statutory workers, nurses and doctors, educators, psychologists, family workers, lawyers, volunteers, and management staff.

The youth sector uses a range of service delivery models to support young people. These include centre-based, outreach, street outreach, inreach, case management, case work, residential, crisis support, group-based work, recreation-based activities, and education.

Process for Developing this Submission

The Youth Coalition welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the development of the ACT Budget 2018-19. This submission is based on:

- Ongoing collaborative work with the ACT Peaks Network;
- Previous Youth Coalition submissions to the ACT Government;
- The policy positions outlined in the *Youth Coalition Policy Platform*;
- The views of participants of the Youth Coalition's Forums and Networks;
- One-on-one consultations with member services and organisations;
- Online survey of members & young people regarding the ACT Budget 2018-19;
- Consultation with frontline youth workers regarding the ACT Budget 2018-19; and
- Current and topical research on youth affairs.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013, *Population by Age and Sex, Regions of Australia*.

2. Introduction

Our Vision for the ACT Community

'...there is plenty more we can do to make the city we love even better. We will keep building on Canberra's potential.'

Andrew Barr, Treasurer's Speech, Budget 2017-18

The Youth Coalition would like to thank the Chief Minister and Treasurer for the opportunity to provide feedback about priorities for the 2018-19 ACT Budget.

We agree that there is more we can do to make Canberra even better, for all members of our community. If we wish to build on the potential of this city, we also need to ensure that the young people and families of our community have the opportunity and supports in place to reach their own personal potential. We continue to believe that Canberra should be the city of choice for young Australians.

The ACT Government's long-term vision for the city has seen an increased investment in infrastructure projects, such as Light Rail and the City to the Lake project. We believe that this same big-picture approach and focus is needed in delivering the services and programs which support all people who live in this city of potential.

In recent years, the Youth Coalition's submissions to the ACT Budget have called for the ACT Government Budget strategy to have a focus on addressing social determinants of health.

For young people, the social determinants of health have significant consequences for their life trajectories. Poverty is a powerful determinant of poor health, and intergenerational poverty (the transmission of poverty from generation to generation) is a major barrier to improving health outcomes and reducing health inequity for the most disadvantaged young people in society.²

The Youth Coalition strongly believes that by addressing the social determinants of health, vulnerable young people can be supported to interrupt and/or move out of cycles of poverty and disadvantage, and live healthy, prosperous lives.

Two years ago we were pleased to see the whole-of-government, whole-of-community approach taken with the *Safer Families* package. We believe this package demonstrates how different areas of Government working together, in partnership with community-based services, can identify and mobilise resources to address key social issues.³ We have also welcomed an increased focus on equity in education, through the *Student Resource Allocation* initiative and the ongoing work of the *Schools for All* project.

The Youth Coalition continues to call on the ACT Government to expand this focus on equity and coordinated approach in service delivery to other areas of the Territory's budget.

Alongside our call for a focus on addressing the social determinants of health, the Youth Coalition continues to emphasise the need for the ACT Government to shift its tertiary-heavy focus of investment in services to the community sector, and make a larger commitment to investment in early intervention and prevention initiatives.

2 Commission on Social Determinants of Health, 2008, *Closing the Gap in a Generation: Health equity through action on the social determinants of health*.

3 Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, *2016-17 ACT Budget: Recognising Social Inclusion as a Core Community Value*

Community services are operating in an environment of constant push to rationalise resources and become more efficient, coupled with the urgent needs of people whose lives are affected by poverty, ill health, violence, racism, unemployment, or other forms of disadvantage. This makes striking the right balance of investment in early intervention challenging. In addition, current levels of investment in tertiary/acute services are unsustainable.

Addressing the root causes of social disadvantage and vulnerability is a clear policy goal locally and nationally, and a common desire in the community sector. The Youth Coalition is of the view that preventing young people from experiencing homelessness, disengaging from education, or becoming involved in the youth justice system, and intervening early in the life of any problem, requires a coordinated, planned effort to address issues such as social inequality, poverty, mental health, alcohol and other drug use, family support, and child protection concerns.

3. Summary of Recommendations

Section 3 provides a summary of all recommendations of this submission. It is vital that these recommendations be referred to in the context of the broader submission.

Education:

Recommendation: Invest in community services to increase their capacity to respond to and partner with schools, so they are able to work collaboratively with the Education Directorate to address educational inequity.

Recommendation: Invest in targeted supports to children and young people, particularly those aged 8-12, providing early intervention and support services, and supporting them to successfully transition from primary to high school.

Mental Health:

Recommendation: Invest in community development projects and programs that increase family and community capacity, knowledge about, and confidence in, supporting the mental health and well-being of young people.

Recommendation: Invest in multidisciplinary teams within schools and community-based youth services to increase their capacity to deliver more integrated, efficient and effective mental health support to young people, both inside and outside of school hours and school terms.

Recommendation: Invest in addressing the gap between early intervention and prevention services and crisis response services.

Recommendation: Reaffirm the ongoing commitment made in the 2017-19 ACT Budget to support headspace Canberra, and continue to commit \$400,000 annually to increase their capacity to meet demand for youth mental health support.

Employment:

Recommendation Develop an accreditation program for employers of young people, which recognises and promotes businesses which demonstrate 'best practice' in employing young people.

Recommendation: Seek opportunities to respond to the changing nature of entry into work, such as flexible programs that provide meaningful work experience, and prepare young people for work in today's world.

Recommendation: Implement & report on targets for all ACT Government funded projects that anticipate creating jobs, to employ people in our community who are most vulnerable to unemployment, including young people.

Recommendation: Invest in a pilot program offering a period of guaranteed employment in ACT Government to young people who are transitioning from Care.

Housing & Homelessness:

Recommendation: Every ACT Government Directorate contribute at least one percent of their operating budget to fund additional measures that increase provision of services to reduce homelessness and increase supply of accessible, affordable housing.

Recommendation: The ACT Government divert \$100 million from its investment portfolio in bonds to create an investment fund for community housing providers for the purpose of building new accessible, affordable rental housing. The fund would be held in perpetuity and repaid at government bond rates.

Services & Supports for Young People:

Recommendation: Invest in a purpose-built building for Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation

Recommendation: Adopt a long term commitment to an ACT Carers Strategy, ensuring the implementation of this strategy is advised and monitored by carer representatives, including young people.

Recommendation: Expand funding for access to the Translation and Interpreting Service (TIS) so that all not-for-profit services working with people experiencing disadvantage that require TIS can access the service.

Recommendation: Invest in a week long program that celebrates young people's contribution to the Canberra community, to meet the gap that will be left by withdrawal of Australian Government funding to National Youth Week activities.

Recommendation: Invest in responding to the gap in services for young people aged 12 - 15 who are experiencing homelessness.

Recommendation: Increased investment in the Child, Youth and Family Services Program

Recommendation: Develop a fit for purpose service procurement framework that includes processes that engage directly with the community to ensure services meet expectations, improve quality, continuity, diversity and sustainability of both the service offer and the workforce. The procurement framework should ensure funder accountability to the community entitled to and/or accessing the service and drive ongoing improvement of procurement processes and outcomes from the perspective of service users.

4. Education

As a result of the diversity within Canberra's suburbs, most ACT schools have small numbers of highly disadvantaged students, rather than disadvantage being concentrated in a few schools. A key focus of the Youth Coalition's advocacy work over the last four years has been the issue of education inequity, leading an ongoing campaign with the ACT Council of Social Services which highlights the issues and challenges of educational equity in the ACT.

Recommendation: Invest in community services to increase their capacity to respond to and partner with schools, so they are able to work collaboratively with the Education Directorate to address educational inequity.

A young person's learning and development is impacted by the community that surrounds them, and not just the support put in place during school hours. Research shows that when communities and schools are engaged it has profoundly positive effects on students, teachers, parents and other members of the community.⁴

The Youth Coalition believes that a whole-of-community approach to addressing educational inequity is needed. We recognise that the cultural differences between the education system and community services system can make it challenging to work collaboratively, but we also believe that their strengths complement each other.

We recognise the increased focus on addressing educational inequity by the Education Directorate, and welcome the ACT Government's investment to implement the *Schools for All* Program. A key focus of this program is building partnerships and connections across the ACT school system and community services. Community services often already have positive relationships with young people and their families who may be struggling with educational attainment. We believe that there is a willingness in both the education system and community services system to work together to address educational disengagement. However, we remain concerned that community services do not have the resources to respond to schools that reach out for support. We continue to highlight the already stretched capacity of community services, and recommend higher levels of investment in community services to increase their capacity to respond to and partner with schools to address educational inequity.

Recommendation: Invest in targeted supports to children and young people, particularly those aged 8-12, providing early intervention and support services, and supporting them to successfully transition from primary to high school.

The Youth Coalition is concerned about the limited early intervention and support services for children aged 8 - 12, an issue often raised by Youth Coalition members and stakeholders. The unique needs of children in these 'middle years' requires targeted supports, particularly focusing on intervening early in the life of an issue, and supporting children as they prepare to transition from primary to high school. The Youth Coalition acknowledges that teachers and schools provide support to students during this time. However, the nature of this transition, with a change in teachers and school environment, can be a stressor for young people, requiring support out of school hours or a classroom environment.

The service gap in this area means that the needs of these children and their families are not being met, increasing the risk of them disengaging in early high school. We believe that community services are well placed and well equipped to provide continual support throughout this period of transition, and are willing to work with schools when they are adequately resourced to meet this need. We recommend that the ACT Government invests in targeted supports to children and young people, particularly those aged 8-12, providing early intervention and support services, and supporting them to successfully transition from primary to high school.

4 Anderson-Butcher, D., et. al., 2010, *Emergent Evidence in Support of a Community Collaboration Model for School Improvement*

5. Mental Health

Mental health is significant for many young people, with one in four experiencing a mental health issue in any given year.⁵ With approximately 78,000 young people in the ACT, almost 20,000 young Canberrans are likely to experience mental ill health at some point in any given year.⁶

Young people in the ACT consistently report mental health and well-being as a top issue of concern. In the 2016 *Rate Canberra* survey conducted by the Youth Coalition, mental health-related issues featured strongly as a concern for young people in each age bracket (ages 12-15, 16-17, 18-21, 22-25). In the survey and consultations held by the Youth Coalition regarding the 2018-19 ACT Budget, 78 percent of respondents rated mental health & well-being as one of the three most important areas of investment for the ACT Government in 2017-18.⁷

Recommendation: Invest in community development projects and programs that increase family and community capacity, knowledge about, and confidence in, supporting the mental health and well-being of young people.

Encouraging appropriate and effective early help-seeking behaviour for mental health issues has been recognised as a key component of prevention and early intervention. Yet, a major challenge is the well-established reluctance of young people to seek professional help.⁸

It is essential that we listen to what young people tell us, as it will help address these issues. During Mental Health Week 2015, the Youth Coalition held consultations with young people who highlighted the importance of building community capacity to support the mental health and well-being of young people.

‘It could be part of management training in all workplaces, at least to help identify signs of mental illness and promote well-being and good mental health.’

‘Young people especially need more education. Not enough young people know how to respond to people with mental ill health.’⁹

The Youth Coalition believes that more preventative mental health measures are needed. These must not only include professional support and should support young people to become more resilient and actively maintain their mental health in the same way they are encouraged to maintain physical health. Education for family, friends, and community members who interact with young people - for example, friends, employers, sports coaches, music teachers etc. are important in supporting young people’s mental health. It is frequently through the intervention of these people that professional mental health care is sought, so we need to ensure that these community members know how to talk about mental health with young people and refer to appropriate professional support when needed.

‘I am not aware of anyone who actually knows there are mental health services available in Canberra; the fact that we don’t even know these services are available means there’s something wrong there’¹⁰

5 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009, *Australian Social Trends: Mental Health*, Australian Government, Canberra.

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

7 Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2017, *Stakeholder Survey 2018-19 ACT Budget*

8 Rickwood, D., Wilson, C., & Deane, F., 2006, *Supporting young people to seek professional help for mental health problems*.

9 Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2015, *Mental Health: Perspectives of Young People aged 12-25 in the ACT*.

10 Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2017, *Stakeholder Survey 2018-19 ACT Budget*

Recommendation: Invest in multidisciplinary teams within schools and community-based youth services to increase their capacity to deliver more integrated, efficient and effective mental health support to young people, both inside and outside of school hours and school terms.

The education system is an opportunistic setting to identify and respond to mental health problems in their early stages. While the Youth Coalition welcomes previous announcements of investment in clinical mental health support for students, we continue to advocate for a cross-sector, co-ordinated and comprehensive approach to ensure access for students and families outside of school hours and school terms. In addition to school psychologists, we call for investment in strengthening the capacity of multidisciplinary teams within schools, as well as community-based youth services, to support the well-being of students.

*'Imagine having a hospital with only one surgeon, schools are too stretched and counsellors and psychologists are either never available or there is too many processes to get an appointment with them.'*¹¹

Recommendation: Invest in addressing the gap between early intervention and prevention services and crisis response services in the ACT mental health system, including outreach services.

Recommendation: Reaffirm the commitment made in the 2017-19 ACT Budget to support headspace Canberra, and continue to commit \$400,000 annually to increase their capacity to meet the demand for youth mental health support.

Frontline youth workers continue to highlight a lack of outreach mental health services for young people, and the significant gap that exists between early intervention mental health services and crisis services for young people in the ACT, particularly for those aged 18 - 25¹². We welcomed the commitment of a one-off \$400,000 investment in headspace Canberra in the 2017-18 ACT Budget, and recommend a continuation of this investment specifically for services provided by headspace Canberra, which are working to address this gap.

'Mental health support requires young people to have the support or skills to attend an office and engage in a very formal service. Outreach services to better tackle low needs mental health and support high needs mental health to engage are required.'

*'More youth mental health support [is most important] - this could be having more headspace centres or funding community agencies to do outreach mental health support.'*¹³

The Youth Coalition has advocated for increased funding for mental health services for a number of years, and have welcomed investment in clinical supports for young people. We look forward to the establishment of the Office for Mental Health, and urge the ACT Government to ensure that young people and youth services are involved in this work. As this will take some time, there is also a need to continue investing in the services which support mental health needs of young Canberrans.

We urge the ACT Government to commit to increasing the investment made in supporting the mental health needs of young Canberrans, through community education, early intervention and prevention, crisis services, and addressing the gaps in the service system between these areas.

11 Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, *Consultations with young people during Mental Health Week 2016*.

12 Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, Submission to the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Service *Inquiry into Youth Suicide and Self-Harm*.

13 Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2017, *Stakeholder Survey 2018-19 ACT Budget*

6. Employment

Youth unemployment and underemployment continues to be a concern both locally and nationally, particularly for young people. While there has been a slight improvement, youth unemployment remains high in the ACT, almost 2.5 times the overall unemployment rate. In September 2017, youth unemployment was at 10.3% compared to 4.4% for the overall ACT population.¹⁴

Unemployment has a significant impact on individuals and has been linked with poor health outcomes, particularly when it comes to stress and its impact on physical and mental health and well-being.¹⁵ Conversely, employment is seen as a protective factor for social inclusion, better health, and improved self esteem.

Unemployment figures hide a larger problem, as they do not take into account young people who are underemployed – those who have some work, but want to work more hours. Compared to other age groups, young people in the workforce are more likely to be employed in part-time or casual jobs, resulting in underemployment.¹⁶ Underemployment figures can be difficult to estimate, however, in the Youth Coalition's 2016 *Rate Canberra* survey 21% of respondents indicated they were looking for work and 46% said they would like to increase the number of hours they currently work. The findings were particularly concerning for those aged 18-21, with 27% of respondents in this age group looking for work and 61% wanting to increase the number of hours they currently work.

Unemployment and underemployment also impacts the broader community, through reducing the tax base and increasing the economic burden on the community. Reducing these impacts is not just the job of the ACT Government, or young people, but needs the support of the business and community sectors. The Youth Coalition would like to see the Canberra develop a reputation as a city that is not only a great place to visit, but a great place for young people to work and live.

Recommendation: Develop an accreditation program for employers of young people, which recognises and promotes businesses which demonstrate 'best practice' in employing young people.

During the *Inquiry into the extent, nature and consequence of insecure work in the ACT* earlier this year, the Youth Coalition raised the idea of developing an 'opt-in' accreditation program for employers of young people. Local businesses could nominate as an 'employer of choice' for young people, highlighting their commitment to ensuring employees were educated about both their responsibilities and rights as employees. Business owners would be committed to understanding how to best support young people who are often juggling employment with study, family or caring responsibilities, and physical or mental health issues. A positive promotion campaign would highlight ethical employers of young people to their community and customers.

Recommendation: Seek opportunities to respond to the changing nature of entry into work, such as flexible programs that provide meaningful work experience, and prepare young people for work in today's world.

In order for young people to engage meaningfully in the current labour market, they need a combination of meaningful work experience that reflects the strengths and aspirations of a young person; education and relevant qualifications; assistance building connections and networks; and, an increased availability of entry level opportunities for young people.

14 ACT Government Treasury, 2017, *Labour Force – September 2017 – Australian Capital Territory (ABS Cat. No. 6202.0)*, accessed 26 October 2017, online at https://apps.treasury.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/399983/LF.pdf

15 Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2013, *What works? A review of actions addressing the social and economic determinants of Indigenous health*.

16 Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2014, *Barely Working: Young and Underemployed in Australia*.

Many young people do not feel that their current studies are adequately preparing them for work. Additionally, the limited number of bridging courses that are available means that some young people who have previously disengaged with education struggle to develop the skills they need to enter the workforce without support.

*'I feel like school could teach us more things about the road that lies ahead of us; we do learn a lot of useful information, but not always what's beneficial like writing a resume, applying for jobs, doing a tax return and finding a rental property.'*¹⁷

*'There aren't a lot of bridging courses to help us get into the career we want... They need to have more inclusive ways to help us get into a career.'*¹⁸

Recommendation: Implement & report on targets for all ACT Government funded projects that anticipate creating jobs, to employ people in our community who are most vulnerable to unemployment, including young people.

The ACT Government's business development strategy and infrastructure spending are key ways that the Government supports employment growth. We encourage the ACT Government to implement and report on targets and strategies in all ACT Government-funded projects that anticipate creating jobs (such as the infrastructure program) to ensure that these projects employ people from specific demographics who might be more vulnerable to unemployment, such as young people.

Recommendation: Invest in a pilot program offering a period of guaranteed employment in ACT Government to young people who are transitioning from Care.

Employment is crucial for a young person's successful transition to independence. The Youth Coalition believes that young people who have had significant involvement of statutory services throughout their lives would benefit from further assistance making this transition.

For many young people in the community, parents and family are able to provide supports, resources, and a buffer for young people seeking independence, including access to the networks and connections that many young people use to secure their first employment opportunities. It must be a key priority for the ACT Government to reduce, or even eliminate, the known pathways from statutory care to homelessness, poverty, and continuing cycles of disadvantage. As included in our last three submissions to the ACT Budget, the Youth Coalition believes the ACT Government, as a body exercising aspects of parental responsibility for children and young people in care, could consider guaranteeing a period of employment for young people who are transitioning from care.

The Youth Coalition believes that a period of guaranteed employment, coupled with available support through the existing Youth Transition Team, would mean young people transitioning from care would be supported to navigate their way to independence and economic participation. We understand that the number of young people exiting care each year in the ACT is around 35-50, and would welcome the introduction of a pilot voluntary employment program for this group of young people.

¹⁷ Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, *Rate Canberra 2016*

¹⁸ Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2017, *Stakeholder Survey 2018-19 ACT Budget*

7. Housing and Homelessness

Addressing youth homelessness and improving the supply of affordable housing has been a key policy focus area for the Youth Coalition for a number of years. Housing is a fundamental determinant of health, well-being, social connection, and workforce participation.

We recognise the attention being given to this issue through the ongoing work of Housing ACT, including the recent consultation process and housing summit. The Youth Coalition is committed to continuing to join with the community sector to speak with unity on this issue, and call on the government to commit not just attention, but also adequate resources, to address youth homelessness and rental housing affordability.

The complexities and issues faced by young people experiencing homelessness are still in need of more attention. For many young people, simply providing a place to live is insufficient to addressing the root causes of homelessness, and does not always end the potential pathways to homelessness in later life. Issues around family relationships, mental health, employment, education, alcohol and other drug use can be barriers to stable housing.

Recommendation: Every ACT Government Directorate contribute at least one percent of their operating budget to fund additional measures that increase provision of services to reduce homelessness and increase supply of accessible, affordable housing.

An understanding of the social determinants of health invites us to consider who is responsible for responses to homelessness. The prevention of homelessness is a whole-of-government responsibility requiring collaboration between the economic policy levers that create jobs, ensuring adequate income when people are not in paid work, the provision of affordable housing, and access to a range of social supports. The Youth Coalition recommends that any directorate not already contributing at least one percent of their operating budget to housing and/or reducing homelessness to allocate one percent of their operating budget to fund additional measures that increase provision of services to reduce homelessness and increase supply of accessible, affordable housing.

Recommendation: The ACT Government divert \$100 million from its investment portfolio in bonds to create an investment fund for community housing providers for the purpose of building new accessible, affordable rental housing. The fund would be held in perpetuity and repaid at government bond rates.

The private rental market in the ACT is amongst the hardest to access in Australia. Many young people report difficulty in gaining entry to private rental properties, due to cost, availability, and discrimination, and consistently report experiencing financial hardship associated with the high cost of living and the relatively expensive rental market in Canberra.

'As young people transition into adulthood the ongoing issues of housing affordability and access are critical. Especially as it is hard to be independent and not also have a car in Canberra. Addressing these population level issues would have positive impact on a range of youth and family issues.'

*'...have cheaper rental programs in place for accommodations to assist young people working on lower wages to assist staying out of public housing.'*¹⁹

A significant investment from the ACT Government is needed to ensure that accessible, affordable rental housing is available for those in our community who need it. The Youth Coalition joins a growing number of community organisations and peak bodies who recommend the ACT Government divert \$100 million from its investment portfolio in bonds to create an investment fund for community housing providers. This fund would be for the purpose of building new accessible, affordable rental housing, and would be held in perpetuity and repaid at government bond rates.

¹⁹ Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2017, *Stakeholder Survey 2018-19 ACT Budget*

8. Supports for Children, Young People, & Families

Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation

Recommendation: Invest in a purpose-built building for Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation

The Youth Coalition understands that ACT Government has been in conversation with Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation for many years regarding the adequacy of the current building the service is located in. We understand that some minimal work has been done to improve the current building over this time, and some discussions have been held regarding a building on a new site, however a suitable alternative has not yet been found.

Gugan Gulwan is a key service for young people and their families in the ACT, supporting families who are experiencing multiple and complex issues, and face significant discrimination and barriers to self determination. The Youth Coalition believes that investment in providing a fully functioning building that meets the requirements of the services being provided in the space is essential, and needs to be an infrastructure priority in the 2018-19 budget.

Additionally, it is essential that the staff team at Gugan Gulwan be consulted regarding both the design and location of the building, to ensure it meets both the current and future needs of the service.

Young Carers

Recommendation: Adopt a long term commitment to an ACT Carers Strategy, ensuring the implementation of this strategy is advised and monitored by carer representatives, including young people.

There are approximately 48,500 unpaid carers in the ACT, of this it is estimated that 1 in 10²⁰ or currently approximately 12,000 young people in the ACT are young carers. Young carers are young people aged 12 – 25 who provide care to a family member or friend living with an illness, disability, mental health issue, alcohol or other drug issue, or are frail aged. A 2005 research project conducted by the Youth Coalition found that young carers cared for an average of 6 hours per day, over a six-year duration.²¹ 21 percent of the 2,052 young people who responded to the Youth Coalition's 2016 Rate Canberra survey reported that caring for a family member was something that was affecting their life.²²

The commitment to the development of a carers strategy by the incoming ACT Government in 2016 was welcomed by the community sector and carers. The Youth Coalition joins Carers ACT in calling for a long term commitment to the ACT Carers Strategy which is currently being developed. A ten year commitment will provide the foundation needed to bring about generational and cultural change to increase awareness of carers, their role in our community, and their support needs.

The voice of carers and those who support them is important in establishing and monitoring the ACT Carers Strategy, and the Youth Coalition recommends that a carer-led governance group be formed and funded to advise & monitor the implementation of this strategy. It is important that this group include representatives from all demographics, including young carers and those who support them.

20 Mary Gays, 2002, *A Lifetime of Caring: ACT Schools-based Young Carers Survey*, Marymead Child and Family Centre, Canberra

21 Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2013, *Policy Platform: Young Carers*

22 Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2016, *Rate Canberra*

Access to the Translating and Interpreting Service for Culturally & Linguistically Diverse Young People

As a population group, young people frequently experience systemic disadvantage, discrimination and unequal access to resources. In addition, there are certain groups of young people that face additional barriers in participating socially, economically and politically in Australian society. While cultural diversity provides a rich and positive contribution to Australian society, multicultural young people may face a number of issues that make them a vulnerable social group.²³

Recommendation: Expand funding for access to the Translation and Interpreting Service (TIS) so that all not-for-profit services working with people experiencing disadvantage that require TIS can access the service.

For multicultural people, especially newly arrived and refugee young people and their families who often possess a low English proficiency, communication is a significant issue. Multicultural young people and their families have the right to communicate in their first or chosen language and effective communication will often require the use of appropriately skilled and trained interpreters. Therefore, it is best practice to engage an interpreter when a young person speaks limited or no English; speaks basic English but is under stress; when discussing important or sensitive information; or when a young person requests an interpreter.²⁴ Additionally, the use of an interpreter is important when engaging with parents who speak limited or no English, even if their children are proficient English speakers, and not rely on young people as translators.

Evidence shows, however, that services are not engaging interpreters when required.²⁵ In a 2015 survey of child, youth and family services in the ACT, 15 out of 24 respondents (63%) identified that their service does not regularly use interpreters when working with young people from CALD backgrounds with low English language proficiency, or could use some improvement in this area.²⁶

The survey results also suggest there is a disconnect between policy and practice in most services. While most respondents reported that their service has policies in place to support the use of interpreters, most also reported that they do not regularly use them when working with young people from low English language proficiency. One respondent specifically raised interpreters as a significant issue for the child, youth and family sector in the ACT, highlighting that the cost of interpreters is significant and there is no funding to assist services in covering this cost.²⁷

Recommendation: Education Directorate develop a specific centralised funding pool for schools to access the TIS, so all schools with students or parents who speak limited or no english can access the service.

Additionally, services report that many schools do not regularly use interpreters to communicate with parents who speak limited or no English. Services report that when schools have access to a centralised fund specifically for access to TIS, they will use it, but if schools are required to self-fund access from within existing resources, access to TIS is rarely prioritised.

Young people are also often required to interpret for family or community members engaging with schools and services. This often places the young person in stressful and inappropriate situations and can limit the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the information or support.²⁸ With the education setting, it can mean that it is not appropriate for multicultural young people to be used as interpreters for family, friends or community members.

23 Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia, 2014, *The CALD Youth Census Report*, Melbourne.

24 The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, 2013, *Promoting the Engagement of Interpreters in Victorian Health Services*, Victoria.

25 The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, 2013, *Promoting the Engagement of Interpreters in Victorian Health Services*, Victoria.

26 MYAN ACT, 2015, *CYFSP Sector Survey 2015*, Youth Coalition of the ACT, Canberra.

27 MYAN ACT, 2015, *CYFSP Sector Survey 2015*, Youth Coalition of the ACT, Canberra.

28 Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2011, *Good Practice Guide: Working with Interpreters*, Melbourne.

As a key challenge for community workers, and one of the most significant barriers for young people accessing services, the Youth Coalition continues to advocate for the use of interpreters as essential when providing support to young people and their families with low English language proficiency. Increased investment is needed within the service system and education system to ensure financial access to use interpreters and that workers are trained to use them.

Youth Week

Recommendation: Invest in a week long program that celebrates young people's contribution to the Canberra community, to meet the gap that will be left by withdrawal of Australian Government funding to National Youth Week activities.

National Youth Week is an annual, week-long celebration of young people (aged 12–25) throughout Australia. A joint initiative of the Australian, State, Territory and Local Governments since 2000, the Australian Government ceased commitment to funding National Youth Week after 2017.

The withdrawal of Australian Government Funding to National Youth Week effectively means that the events and activities held during a dedicated year each year which celebrate young people, and connect with them with their communities, will cease unless state and territory governments step in and invest in this opportunity. We acknowledge the work currently being undertaken by the the Community Service Directorate to engage with young people about the best way to celebrate Youth Week in the ACT, and recommend the ACT Government resource a program which continues to actively celebrate and recognise young people's contribution to and participation in community.

Supports for under-16 year olds experiencing homelessness

Recommendation: Invest in responding to the gap in services for young people aged 12 - 15 who are experiencing homelessness.

Frontline youth workers have raised concerns regarding a gap in services for young people aged 12 - 15 who are who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness. Specifically, this gap refers to young people who are not eligible for accommodation support because of their age, but are not considered in need of care and protection intervention. These young people fall through the gap between care and protection intervention and homelessness support.

Unfortunately, this is not a new issue. Youth Coalition members and stakeholders have been raising concerns about this gap with us for many years. A forum was first held back in November 2009 to discuss this issue, and make recommendations on what could be done to address this gap. We are aware that the Community Services Directorate is currently engaging with community services, other areas of ACT Government, and current research to identify the best way to respond. The Youth Coalition recommends that the ACT Budget 2018-19 invests in responding to the recommendations that will come out of this work, and acts promptly to address the needs of this small but extremely vulnerable group of young people.

Increased Role and Scope for the Child, Youth & Family Services Program

Recommendation: Increased investment in the Child, Youth and Family Services Program

The Child, Youth and Family Services Program (CYFSP) aims to provide an integrated and collaborative, child centred and family focused service system which meets the needs of vulnerable children, youth and families in our community. With the implementation of 'A Step Up for Our Kids' the 2015-2020 Out of Home Care Strategy, an increased focus on schools and community services working together to support vulnerable students and their families, and increased community awareness of the impacts of domestic and

family violence, the CYFSP program is well placed to be providing much needed and valuable supports to children, young people and families across the ACT.

With an expected annual population growth in the ACT of over 6000 people per year by 2020-21,²⁹ investments now need to extend beyond meeting the current and future infrastructure needs of our city. The ACT Government is continuing an intensive infrastructure program delivering entire new suburbs, as well as urban infill & densification, and there is a need to further invest in the services that will support this growth in population. Resources in community services are already stretched, and the increased demand for services has not been met with increased funding in this program.

'Apartment blocks are going up everywhere, from Tuggeranong to the new suburbs in Molonglo, West Belconnen and Gungahlin. Most services are already stretched to capacity - if the people who move into them need any sort of community support, how can we meet those needs?'

*'[A barrier to young people accessing] the Youth Engagement Teams - it's purely the capacity factor. ie: 4 Youth workers to cover Woden/ Weston Creek and now Molonglo without any funding for more workers.'*³⁰

The Youth Coalition is concerned that at current capacity, the CYFSP program cannot meet community expectation or effectively address service needs and gaps that have been raised by referring agencies, such as ACT Policing, intake services, and youth engagement workers in recent months. Without additional resources, these gaps will only increase as our population increases.

Developing a Fit for Purpose Procurement Framework

Recommendation: Develop a fit for purpose service procurement framework that includes processes that engage directly with the community to ensure services meet expectations, improve quality, continuity, diversity and sustainability of both the service offer and the workforce. The procurement framework should ensure funder accountability to the community entitled to and/or accessing the service and drive ongoing improvement of procurement processes and outcomes from the perspective of service users.

In September 2016, the Youth Coalition welcomed the launch of the ACT Community Services Industry Strategy 2016-2026 (the Strategy). We acknowledge the significant work of ACTCOSS in supporting community sector engagement in the development of the Strategy, and continue to support the recommendation of the development of a fit for purpose service procurement framework.

²⁹ Andrew Barr, ACT Treasurer's Speech, Budget 2017-18. <https://apps.treasury.act.gov.au/budget/budget-2017-2018/speech>
³⁰ Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2017, *Stakeholder Survey 2018-19 ACT Budget*