



Mental Health
Community Coalition ACT

ACT Government 2024–25 Budget Analysis

July 2024

The Mental Health Community Coalition ACT welcomes the continued funding for Government-run mental health services in the ACT Government's 2024–25 Budget. However, we are disappointed the focus on wellbeing in this budget has not translated into new funding for community-managed mental health services.

What is missing

- 1. Our pre-budget submission called on the ACT Government to increase funding for the community-managed mental health sector from 10% to 20% of total mental health funding. This was not delivered.**

Properly funded community-managed mental health services mean better prevention, early intervention, rehabilitation, and recovery-oriented service to help people before and after they experience a mental health crisis.

Our members provide services that are well-placed to address the 'missing middle' – those with mental health conditions "too severe" for straightforward treatment managed by a GP and "not severe enough" for crisis care or ongoing, intensive supports through the NDIS. Failure to fund community mental health services means opportunities to avoid expensive, often traumatic acute hospital care are missed. This poor care and poor economics with costs to individuals and families, as well as taxpayers.

- 2. No funding for the community-managed mental health sector to meet the demands of outcomes measurement.**

Our pre-budget submission highlighted the increased resourcing required to meet the demands of outcomes measurement. This has also not been considered in the budget, leaving our mental health system largely outcome blind. Better, organised outcomes reporting is vital to enable quality improvement across Canberra's mental health care system.

- 3. No increased funding for perinatal mental health services.**

With 1 in 5 new mothers and 1 in 10 new fathers impacted, perinatal mental illness is episodic and linked to life stage; this means it doesn't qualify as a permanent disability as required for NDIS support.

The ACT is missing integrated mental health care for people during this vulnerable time of their lives. Parents need the opportunity to remain with their babies during mental health crisis, yet we have no facilities available.

We acknowledge the continued funding for the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement, under which the ACT Government has committed to routine perinatal mental health screening. There is more to be done than tracking statistics.

4. No funding to institute a peer workforce peak body or funding to train organisations like our members to integrate peer workers into the mental health system.

This is a missed opportunity to see the benefits of a peer workforce; benefits of which included in the ACT's own Mental Health Workforce Strategy and the federal government's Lived Experience Workforce Guidelines.

5. No dedicated programs to reduce rates of loneliness in the ACT.

Loneliness prevalence in the ACT is the highest of all Australian jurisdictions. It is associated with a range of mental and physical health risks, including early death.

Loneliness is not a widely understood public health issue but must be prioritised as such.

6. Limited funding for policies to ensure an equitable, wellbeing-focused response to climate change in the ACT.

We see that existing climate change strategies leave behind our most vulnerable people, compounding cost-of-living stress and abandoning the principles of community wellbeing and inclusion.

While \$190 million was dedicated to climate action initiatives over the next 4 years and the Government noted partnerships with community sector, we recommend the ACT Government centre mental health, vulnerable people, and connected communities in climate change strategies.

Further detail on our recommendations can be found in our [submission to the Inquiry into Climate Change and a Just Transition](#).

7. No funding for the ACT Recovery College.

This is a lost opportunity to see the growth of a community-led, well-evidenced, cost-effective resource.

8. No funding for ACT Neurodiversity Strategy.

We join our colleagues at Advocacy for Inclusion in their recommendation the Government dedicate specific funding for the ACT public schools Disability Inclusion Strategy (DIS). We seek clarity particularly on the scope of the ACT Neurodiversity Strategy within the DIS.

What was included

We recognise the Government's stated budget commitment to work 'with community health partners to provide a strong mental health system for Canberrans'.

- **Youth mental health:** We welcome the continuation of community child and youth mental health support programs including MindMap, WOKE, Stepping Stones and the Youth Mental Health Promotion Program.
- **Police, Ambulance, and Clinician Early Response (PACER):** We welcome the continuation the second PACER team providing acute mental health assessment and care services. We encourage the Government to increase the capacity of our community-managed mental health services, like PACER, their in-community interventions reduce that strain on emergency services.
- **Safer Families Levy:** We welcome the funding boost to frontline domestic, family and sexual violence services from the Safer Families Levy, particularly to our members YWCA and Women's Health Matters. The community-managed sector is well-placed to provide practical and supportive resources such as housing and domestic violence support.
- **First Nations mental health services:** We welcome funding for the co-design of a new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth mental health service. We encourage the Government to take a genuine approach to consultation and ensure it is truly collaborative.
- **Cost of living:** We welcome the funding for MHCC members Fearless Women and Women's Health Matters to pilot new programs to support vulnerable members of the community.
- **Housing support:** We welcome the additional support to community-based programs that support people with severe mental health issues to recover in community. We look forward to seeing the detail of this funding commitment.
- **Step Up and Step Down at Home program:** We welcome the changes to the Step-Up-Step Down at-home program to align to a distress brief intervention model.
- **Detention Exit Community Outreach program:** We welcome the additional funding for the Detention Exit Community Outreach program, run by one of our members, Wellways. There is an overrepresentation of people with mental health conditions in the justice system. This program will provide transitional mental health and life skills support for people with a mental illness returning to the community.
- **Mental Health Justice Clinic:** We welcome the additional funding to Canberra Community Law to increase the clinic's capacity to provide legal assistance to people experiencing mental ill-health.
- **New pilot Community Partnership Electrification Program:** We welcome this pilot as part of the Integrated Energy Plan – Vulnerable Household Electrification Programs. MHCC member Financial Care will partner with the ACT Government to deliver this work.



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