



**ACT Council of Social Services**  
6 Gritten St, Canberra Australian Capital Territory 2611

**ACT Down Syndrome Association**  
Building 1, Pearce Community Centre, Pearce ACT, 2607

**Advocacy for Inclusion**  
2.02 Griffin Centre, 20 Genge St Canberra City, 2601

**Health Care Consumers ACT**  
Maitland House 100 Maitland Street, Hackett, 2602

**Mental Health Community Coalition**  
level 1, Griffin Centre, 20 Genge St, Canberra City

**Women with Disabilities ACT**  
Building 1, Pearce Community Centre, Pearce ACT, 2607

## Joint Media Release

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### **2023 Budget: Barr Government must fund promised disability strategies**

Canberra organisations representing people with disability have come together urging ACT Chief Minister and Treasurer Andrew Barr to deliver on ACT Government commitments to people with disability when he hands down next week's ACT Budget.

Organisations have joined forces to urge the ACT Treasurer to deliver funding for promised disability strategies, including the ACT Disability Strategy and sub strategies for health, inclusive education and justice.

They have also urged specific attention to priorities for more accessible housing and better transport and urban planning, services to address the impacts of domestic violence, services for people with intellectual disability and action on inclusive education.

Investments in access to health are being flagged as key by the ACT disability sector in 2023. Priorities for organisations include disability liaison positions within hospitals, better mental health supports for people with intellectual disability, work to ensure accessibility of the My Digital Health record platform and to mitigate the ongoing impacts of COVID19 on our community.

This follows a [shared statement](#) issued by a number of organisations earlier this year calling on the ACT Government to retain discrete capacity to deliver better outcomes for people with disability and to match broad ambitions with targeted funds.

Quotes attributable to sector representatives:

**AFI Head of Policy Craig Wallace** said: "This needs to be a Budget where we see that the ACT Chief Minister and the Labor/Greens Government are serious about backing their own signature strategies to improve the wellbeing of Canberrans with disability, some of which have been on the table for years.

"These include the ACT Disability Strategy, the ACT Disability Health Strategy, the Disability Justice Strategy and the ACT Inclusive Education Strategy. As the Federal Labor Government has now made clear the States and Territories, including the ACT, which was the NDIS launch site ten years ago, have important responsibilities beyond the NDIS and need to start lifting their game in these 'mainstream' areas.

“AFI’s pre budget [submission](#) package outlines the investments we need to see in these strategies and areas, the need to address gaps in disability support, deliver affordable accessible housing plus accessibility in transport and the urban realm amidst Canberra’s rapid development. In addition, we emphasise the need to address the cost of living squeeze on low income people with disability, the continuing impacts of COVID and unintended consequences from legislation like Voluntary Assisted Dying. Finally, we seek targeted funding to facilitate disability rights approaches to climate change as well as a transition to community controlled disability events in the ACT”, Craig Wallace said.

**Shannon Kolak, Chief Executive Officer of the ACT Downs Syndrome Association (ACTDSA)** said “ACTDSA calls for the ACT Government to provide substantial funding for the implementation of the ACT Disability Strategy, development and implementation of the ACT Health Disability Strategy and the development and implementation of the Inclusive Education Strategy for ACT Public Schools. While this work is a vital step towards a more inclusive Canberra, the ACT Government must ensure that significant funding is made available for the robust implementation of this work.

“ACTDSA calls for increased funding and capacity for mental health services for people with an intellectual disability. The ACT Government must invest in services and supports that ensure people with an intellectual disability have access to appropriate and affordable services within a reasonable timeframe.

ACTDSA also calls for increased funding to support domestic and family violence services to ensure the safety of people with a disability and their families. ACTDSA has received increasing reports of family violence within the disability community and additional resources are required to ensure the safety of some of our communities most vulnerable people”, Shannon Kolak concluded. You can see [ACT DSA’s submission](#) here.

**Kat Reed the Chief Executive Officer of Women with Disabilities ACT (WWDACT)** said: “WWDACT calls for adequate and sustained funding commitments for the ACT Disability Strategy, the Disability Health Strategy and the Inclusive Education Review.

“We call for increased funding for violence crisis services to employ Disability Inclusion Advocates. Women\* with disabilities are two times more likely to experience domestic violence than women\* without disabilities. WWDACT has heard atrocious stories of intense and severe abuse of women\* with disabilities occurring in the ACT. Urgent and immediate action must be taken to ensure that women\* with disabilities can access crisis services and live violence free lives.

“Women\* with disabilities in the ACT face discrimination accessing vital health care services. We call for a Disability Liaison Officer (DLO) position to be funded at Canberra Health Services and Canberra Hospital, to advocate on behalf of patients with disabilities and enable women\* with disabilities to feel safe, heard and respected. The Victorian budget announced last week contained a commitment to continued funding for their DLOs for health services (\$8.3m over 3 years). The ACT Government must implement steps to ensure people with disabilities are able to access vital healthcare on equal terms with those without disability.

“We call for budget measures that implement affordable and accessible Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) in the ACT. Increasing access and reducing cost of ART were proposed next steps in the ACT Government Response to Assisted Reproductive Technology: Regulation and Access. As there are no subsidised ART clinics in the ACT, accessing low-cost fertility treatment requires travelling interstate, which is incredibly inaccessible for women\* with disabilities. We call for urgent funding to remove the barriers

women\* with disabilities experience to exercising their right to become parents. (\* women, girls and non-binary people”, Kat Reed concluded.

**Darlene Cox, Executive Director, Health Care Consumers' Association (HCCA)** said that “HCCA strongly supports adequate funding for the Disability Health Strategy. While the Strategy is still in development, commitments are needed to ensure people with disabilities have access to quality, safe health care when they need it.

“Strategic investment is needed so people with disabilities can get the right care at the right time, where they need it. We strongly encourage the government to fund targeted initiatives to address the affordability of health care for people with disabilities, and this includes primary care. Affordability of GPs, costs of transport, and increased cost-of-living in other areas, create barriers to accessing timely care and lead to increased pressure on the hospital system.

“Now we have the Digital Health Record, commitment is needed to ensure that people with disabilities and their families can realise the benefits of this system. This includes ensuring the MyDHR platform is fully accessible, providing consumer education in accessible formats and providing targeted support for digital literacy” Darlene Cox concluded.

**Dr Devin Bowles, Chief Executive Officer, ACT Council of Social Services (ACTCOSS)**, said, “The ACT Council of Social Service echoes calls to resource the implementation of the Disability Strategy and the Disability Health Strategy.

“Systemic reforms such as the ones the ACT Government has committed to in producing these whole of system strategies require adequate and sustainable funding to implement. This funding is required to ensure that everyone in Canberra is able to afford and access high quality healthcare with dignity and respect, Devin Bowles concluded.”

## **Media Contacts**

Devin Bowles, Chief Executive Officer, ACT Council of Social Services - 0413 435 080

Darlene Cox, Chief Executive Officer, Health Care Consumers Association - 02 6230 7800

Shannon Kolack, Chief Executive Officer, ACT Down Syndrome Association - 0408 646 857

Kat Reed, Chief Executive Officer, Women with Disabilities ACT - 0412 094 757

Craig Wallace, Head of Policy, Advocacy for Inclusion - 0477 200 755