



**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

**Mental Health Community Coalition**

Level 1, Griffin Centre, 20 Genge St, Canberra City, 2601

**Women with Disabilities ACT**

Building 1, Pearce Community Centre, Pearce ACT, 2607

## Media Release: ACT Budget - disability groups call for whole of Government disability response and boost to struggling disability advocacy services

13 March 2024

As we move into the 2024 Budget and election period, ACT disability organisations have issued wide ranging statements and submissions calling for a whole of government push to meet the needs of people with disability across all ACT government directorates as well as a boost for struggling and underfunded disability advocacy.

Launching a [shared 2024/25 budget submission](#), the ACT's peak disability bodies said that the funding was needed to address the findings of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse and Neglect of People with Disability, the implications of the wide-ranging NDIS review changes and to make good on the ACT governments promised ACT Disability Strategy and other reforms like the proposed Disability Inclusion Act.

Craig Wallace, A/g CEO of Advocacy for Inclusion said 'this year we are calling for a **whole of government disability investment** with new money to be earmarked to each ACT government directorate for spending on improved responses for people with disability in children and family services, teaching in school infrastructure, healthcare staff training provision and infrastructure, transport provision, psychosocial support, public and social housing provision, justice dimension courts, and policing and urban infrastructure and planning. At least 60% of this premium should go towards the frontline delivery”.

“We **welcomed the \$4 million investment in the Disability Health Strategy** announced in last month’s midyear update and call for that investment to move beyond planning, scoping and communications work. We need **practical efforts** to improve the health experience of people with disability including training practitioners, extended GP consultations for people with disability, funding for wraparound diagnostic services, community health access grants and disability liaison officers within the Canberra Hospital and the rehab hospital. The test should be whether a disabled patient in a ward or in the rehab hospital gets a better and safer experience”, Craig Wallace said

Kat Reed, CEO of Women with Disabilities ACT said the disability groups “urged the Government to prioritise a **package to prevent violence against women and children** to include a focus on accessible education and reporting to ensure all children have access to sexual health and consent education.

“We also seek **an expansion of accessible crisis services** in domestic violence and training for government workers and frontline workers about disability environments.

“In addition we need work to address the **overrepresentation of parents with disability in the child and youth protection systems** through better supports including a service navigator and an integrated crisis response”, Kat Reed said.

Organisations also call for **improved funding for complex case management**. “We are seeing gaps for people who have complex disabilities or a combination of problems. They need clinical and social support service to be available and to work more effectively in coordination for people with complex disabilities including people with mental illness and those leaving hospital who fall through the cracks of the NDIS, health and aged care systems” said Associate Professor Sebastian Rosenberg, outcomes development specialist working with the Mental Health Community Coalition of the ACT

Shannon Kolak, Chief Executive Officer of ACT Down Syndrome and Intellectual Disability “urged the Government to deliver **an expanded mental health clinic for children and adults with intellectual disability**, available to GPs and primary health.

“We also need to see a fully realised and meaningful **inclusive education strategy** with a focus on **reducing the workload of teachers** by providing additional teaching staff and support people, investing in **universal design and infrastructure** and **increasing student loadings** for students with disability.

“In addition we need **dedicated funds to improve housing outcomes** for people with disability including a **housing advocacy program** to help people with disability find and retain housing along with negotiating with landlords and social housing providers plus a **dedicated funding stream to support people with intellectual disability live independently** outside group settings and work to improve responses by the housing market”, Shannon Kolak concluded.

The groups also call for an improvement in the supply of affordable and accessible housing and to support people with disability to advocate to gain and retain housing with more funding for public housing at the gold standard of accessibility,

Finally, advocacy groups are uniting to call for **more money for disability advocacy** following an unprecedented surge in demand, case complexity and requirements for complex and sophisticated advice on disability.

AFI A/g CEO Craig Wallace said “we are taking the step of calling for a direct injection of **\$750,000 to disability advocacy** to respond to an unprecedented surge in demand for individual and systemic advocacy driven by a rise in complex matters in areas like housing, justice and employment and the need to interact with complex government reforms, demographic change and policy shifts arising from the Disability Royal Commission and the NDIS Review.

“We continue to focus attention on **proposed NDIS Review reforms** and our expectations in the scope, design and implementation of the planned new systems of ‘foundational supports’. These need to be truly foundational based on a bedrock of secure funding and policy commitment so we don’t slide back to the old capped and rationed system characterised by dysfunctional funding relationships between levels of government, a lottery dependent on your disability diagnosis and a narrow choice of providers. This is a major redesign task which will require genuine and resourced co-design. We also need to address some urgent priorities arising from local providers, like Woden Community Services, leaving the NDIS market and changes to programs like CASP”, Craig Wallace concluded.

Advocacy Groups have also released a [statement](#) outlining shared priorities for ACT Government action following the **Disability Royal Commission**. The Statement, which has been sent to ACT Chief Minister Andrew Barr MLA and the Minister for Disability Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, calls for wide ranging actions to implement the Royal Commission's recommendations in the ACT.

In the ACT we highlight some key issues in areas like justice where we support a **court-based diversion program for people with disability**, funding for **pre-crisis interventions** and diversion from corrections, an end to indefinite detention in justice settings, continued **improvements to screening in AMC** and as well as actions to **improve the situation of people under guardianship and trustee arrangements**, to **end gender-based violence** and **better support parents** with disability.

In addition, we urge the ACT Government to use its seat in the National Cabinet to support national reforms like a **Disability Rights Act**, **reform the broken Disability Discrimination Act** and **dedicated funding across intergovernmental agreements** along with signature changes in areas like guardianship and changing Australia's discriminatory **migration laws**.

The Statement also highlights some areas missed by the Commission such as poverty and transport, intersectional issues and gender-based violence. We were pleased to see some of these acknowledged in the [Australian Government Progress Update](#) on the Royal Commission which was released earlier today.

We offer these priorities to help inform responses by Governments which are now expected by the middle of the year (last week saw an announcement from Governments delaying a response which the Commission had recommended occur by March).

Shared Budget Submissions on policy and advocacy:

<https://www.advocacyforinclusion.org/2024-25-act-government-budget/>

Shared DRC statement: <https://www.advocacyforinclusion.org/joint-statement-of-priorities-following-the-disability-royal-commission-report/>

**Contacts:** Craig Wallace, Advocacy for Inclusion on 0477 200 755 with Kat Reed, Women with Disabilities ACT on 0412 094 757; Shannon Kolak, ACT Down Syndrome and Intellectual Disability on 0408 646 857; and Associate Professor Sebastian Rosenberg, the Mental Health Community Coalition of the ACT on (02) 6249 7756