

Joint Submission

Shared investment priorities for the ACT Government Budget 2025-26

Issued by: **Advocacy for Inclusion, ACT Down Syndrome & Intellectual Disability, and Women with Disabilities ACT**

About us

This is a joint submission from three organisations representing Canberrans with disabilities.

Advocacy for Inclusion (AFI) is an independent organisation delivering reputable national systemic advocacy informed by our experience in individual advocacy and community and government consultation. We provide dedicated individual and self-advocacy services, training, information and resources in the ACT. As a Disabled People's Organisation, the majority of our organisation, including our Board of Management, staff and members, are people with disabilities. AFI speaks with lived experience and is committed to advancing opportunities for the insights of people with disability to be heard and acknowledged.

Women with Disabilities ACT (WWDACT) is a systemic advocacy and peer support organisation dedicated to advancing the rights, safety, and inclusion of women, girls, and non-binary individuals with disabilities in the ACT region. Established in 1995, WWDACT's work is underpinned by a human rights philosophy, aligning closely with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). WWDACT is unique in its intersectional approach to gender and disability advocacy, utilising co-design principles and lived experiences of members to influence policy and drive systemic change. We are proudly owned and operated by women* with disabilities, which gives an authentic voice resonating with the community we serve.

ACT Down Syndrome & Intellectual Disability (DSID) is committed to promoting and supporting inclusivity across the ACT and surrounding regions by ensuring the authentic voice of people with intellectual disability is heard and understood. We work actively within the community to assist in the removal of barriers for people with disability to access mainstream services and we aim to improve the quality of life for people with intellectual disability by providing support and information to families, carers, schools, employers and organisations.

AFI, WWDACT and DSID come together to create the **ACT Disability Directed Consumer Advocacy Caucus**. We also caucus on some issues, such as the recent ACT election, with the Mental Health Community Coalition of the ACT (MHCC ACT). While we retain organisational distinctions, the caucus formalises our commitment to shared advocacy and representative work to the ACT Government on some key issues and matters of practice.

Introduction

The ACT Disability Directed Advocacy Caucus is pleased to make a submission to the community consultation process for the 2025/26 ACT Budget.

We have identified **five key priorities** for consideration and targeted investment.

We have **two main urgent priority funding** asks to address the disability advocacy funding crisis and enable people with disability to engage with government reforms, support the foundational supports implementation and stocktake, audit and surface capacity to deliver tier one foundational supports. These are specific and costed.

We also seek better government delivery capability and funding to deliver government election promises and address key priorities and support gaps.

Our priorities

Priority 1: Rescue package for ACT disability advocacy

We welcomed the acknowledgement from ACT Labor about the important role systemic advocacy and peak bodies play in supporting the disability community and the government, as well as the pressures all community sector organisations are experiencing and the load of disability reform work.

We are in crisis from sustained pressure in our individual and systemic advocacy work due to demography, NDIS changes, engagement with multiple reform processes including in Health, Education and Justice, multiple reform pieces, expanded expectations and the continued fallout from COVID. Our organisations are facing key stresses, staring down the barrel of cuts and imminent redundancies and will not be able to meet Government and community expectations for continued engagement in reform work without appropriate resourcing.

We have already withdrawn from engagement with the implementation of the governments Voluntary Assisted Dying Scheme as we are unable to resource the required policy development, consultation and engagement work that this issue requires.

Shared funding ask - rescue package for ACT disability advocacy

In our [2024/25 Submission](#) we put forward a modest but significant funding ask, with the Mental Health Community Coalition, to enable our organisations to respond and carry on which would see an increase of \$800,000 per annum across our organisations and MHCC. This ask remains.

However an immediate first step to ensuring a minimum level of resourcing to enable us to carry on would be **priority funding of \$120,000 p.a for a new shared systemic advocacy position** to support the caucus to undertake shared collaborative policy work, consultation and engagement across our three organisations with key policy areas where the ACT government now seeks our increased engagement especially health, education, foundational support design and development and housing. More support is urgent, and this is only a stop-gap solution.

Priority 2: Funding people with disability to engage in foundational support reforms

We need funding for people with disability to engage in the construction of foundational supports which essentially represents an entirely new support system. This includes funding and support for disability directed organisations to audit, stocktake and surface capacity to deliver General Foundational Supports for information, referral and advocacy. The NDIS has taught us much about the need for supports that are grounded in the local community rather than outsourced or provided by interstate providers with limited ACT capacity.

There has been consistent feedback across the consultations pointing to the need for locally grown and controlled advocacy, referral and information services while there are known hazards in trying to transplant non-ACT providers without local knowledge, capacity and accountability. We cannot leave the provision of these supports to large organisations outside of Canberra and we also cannot leave the decision making to the Commonwealth, but ACT organisations are already stretched and need support to form a viable service offer.

Shared funding ask – local foundational support readiness boost

We seek urgent funding to enable disability organisations to develop capacity and capability to offer these services and to be able to scale up quickly including developing a quality service prospectus and business case.

We seek \$150,000 in 2025/26 (non-recurrent) to support disability directed organisations to audit, stocktake and surface capacity to deliver General Foundational Supports supports for information, referral and advocacy

Priority 3: Funding for reform policy capability in the ACT Government

While the ACT Government has made some good early investments in the taskforce and reform work it is our view that Government capability needs to be around double what it is now if we are to meet community expectations for adequate consultation and elements of co-design and the delivery of the new system within an adequate timeframe.

The changes to the NDIS and the decisions by a number of agencies to leave disability provision due to sustainability issues mean that there is an urgent and immediate imperative to ramp up work on Foundational Supports and also to get it right.

Priority 4: Meeting critical unmet needs

In addition to the government election commitments, we have also identified a series of policy priorities to improve the experiences of the 1 in 5 Canberrans with disability. These include:

Priority Foundational support areas

- Funding for **case management** and people requiring intensive wraparound supports
- Addressing critical gaps in the NDIS including **psychosocial support of people with intellectual disability**

Disability liaison officers

- **Disability Liaison Officers in health settings and housing** as promised in the ACT Disability Strategy
- Disability Liaison Officers in all **violence crisis support organisations**

Health

- Ensuring **disability health strategy** funding addresses key patient facing gaps including in acute settings and the rehab hospital
- **Funding people with disability to engage in health reform** including the implementation of Voluntary Assisted Dying and funding disability focussed safeguards, supports and harm reduction

Education

- **Increases to the student loading** for students with disability

Planning and housing

- More work on **social planning, growing on demand transport**
- Action on **accessible housing** beyond public and social housing including a housing advocate

Violence prevention

- Investments to prevent violence against women with disability including **accessible services and shelters and accessible resources and tailored education** – there should be a client facing disability liaison resource available across violence services
- **Fully funded violence prevention strategy** with police resourcing as well as time and funding for thorough consultations

Justice

- Continued and increased attention to the circumstances of **people with disability in the prison** and other closed settings
- Continued focus on access to justice through delivery of the **Disability Justice Strategy**

Inclusion

- Resourcing that responds to the requirements for disability organisations stemming from the **new ACT Inclusion Bill**

Families

- Investments in **practical supports for parents with disability** to reduce presence in child, youth and family protection services

Priority 5: Delivering government election commitments

During the election the returned Barr Government made a number of key commitments to deliver programs, strategies and policies for people with disability and we look forward to this budget including priority investments to deliver these promises.

We were encouraged by the commitments regarding policy work and expenditure on the various disability strategies announced in the lead up to the ACT election.

In healthcare, we look forward to seeing the delivery of expanded services to support people to address and manage chronic pain and complex health conditions, the strengthening of health liaison and navigation services, and the development of a neurodiversity strategy.

We are eager to realise the prioritisation of universal design principles in new schools and school upgrades, as well as funding to expand the provision of disability advocacy services for parents and families involved with the child protection system.

Likewise prioritising disability modifications in public housing and strengthening navigation services and supports have our support.

We also look forward to the development of a new Social Compact over the next 18 months. The compact should speak to the inherent value of the sector and representative organisations, the features of genuine community partnerships and recommit to timely, fulsome, accessible and appropriate consultation. People with disability and representative organisations should be closely involved in its development.

As the Government works to implement these priorities, the approach to, **development and implementation of the new system of Foundational Supports is of utmost importance**. The design and implementation of the new system of Foundational Supports answers a pressing need and presents an enormous opportunity.

It is vital that disability and community organisations are supported and included during this process, the ACT Government is resourced appropriately to engage in this work, and it is essential that support gaps are appropriately surfaced and understood.

The risk of insufficient investment and planning for foundational supports is that they fail to deliver, a risk which will have significant flow on effects across the board from community housing, family children's services to legal aid.

Contacts: To discuss this submission in the first instance please contact Craig Wallace, Head of Policy Advocacy for Inclusion via Craig@advocacyforinclusion.org