

# SUPPORTING THE COMMUNITY SECTOR

## INTRODUCTION

**The ACT Greens want to create a society where the wellbeing of our community is put at the forefront of all government policy.**

The ACT Greens recognise that the Community Sector consistently provides high-quality support to a diverse range of people in our community. The sector makes a significant contribution to the ACT economy, brings in new expertise and knowledge, and plays a central role in developing the well-being and the healthy functioning of our community.

This is despite working in environments with inadequate, often short-term funding and inadequate engagement from government. COVID-19 is further exacerbating disadvantage and inequality, putting increased demands on our sector.

There are 37,000 people and 6000 children in low-income households and 26,000 living below the poverty line in the ACT. We have known what the social determinants of poverty are for decades, and the ACT Greens recognise that now is the time to properly fund and support the community sector, in order to tackle the growing inequality crisis our community faces.

**That's why our 'Supporting the Community Sector Package' will provide increased, guaranteed, long term funding to the groups that provide assistance and support to members of our community who are doing it tough.**

Our plan includes:

- 1. More funding and funding certainty**
- 2. Establishing a Community Recovery Cabinet Committee with ministers and sector representatives, to listen, consult and respond to the sectors' expertise.**
- 3. Providing support for the community sector to access up to date technology**
- 4. Supporting the community sector to transition its fleet to electric vehicles**
- 5. Growing and better supporting the community sector workers in housing**
- 6. Driving a gender-led recovery**
- 7. Increasing support for the community drug and alcohol services sector**

## 1. MORE FUNDING AND FUNDING CERTAINTY

- **Providing more funding for the community sector, commensurate with community need**
- **Providing more certainty for the community sector with longer term funding agreements**
- **Legislating access to the portable long service leave scheme for peak bodies and advocacy organisations where required**

The Community Sector in the ACT provides an invaluable service to members of our community, particularly those doing it tough. The ACT population is growing and demand for community sector essential services is continually stretched, yet funding levels remain almost static. Many of these organisations have existed on baseline funding that has not increased commensurate with population growth and increased demand. As the pandemic progresses, and we all feel the impacts on many levels, it is clear that we cannot go back to pre-COVID funding levels.

We know there are more people reaching out for support who have not reached out before. The pressure on community sector organisations and service providers is increasing by the day, with some services experiencing double or triple previous demand levels. Short-term funding agreements and one-off grants create uncertainty and pressure for community service providers who need to just get on with delivering services instead of worrying about whether they can continue to deliver their programs and keep their staff.

**That is why the ACT Greens will work with the sector to undertake a comprehensive needs analysis that takes into account population growth, increased demand for support, increased complexity of client needs and increased costs of salaries and operation.** It will also include working out ways to capture the right data to show us how we are making a difference - for example, what the outcomes are and how they can be measured. These responses will be co-designed with the sector, which is best placed to identify what is required. New funding agreements will be for a minimum of five years, with the ability to have longer agreements for agencies with proven track records.

**Community Sector funding will be indexed to match population growth, able to meet demand while ensuring that all community sector workers can be paid award wages without the need to do unpaid overtime to meet their workload, and have security of employment.**

To properly face the challenges of the next four years, in a time of significant fiscal pressure and with a public service that, like all of us, is experiencing the difficulties of living and working during the global health emergency that COVID 19 presents, we must work together better than ever before. The ACT Greens want genuine ongoing and robust dialogue, feedback and

support from the broader community sector on targeted interventions and development of responsive initiatives to ensure that we fully understand the vital areas of need.

This also means refreshing and enlivening the Social Compact, making sure that it is a relevant working document that spells out how government and the community sector work together as we work towards a better normal.

The Greens also recognise the vital role that peak organisations play in the community services sector, and as an intermediary between service delivery organisations and governments. They identify systemic issues from the agencies working on the ground and at the front line. With their advocacy, community service organisations can be assured that attention is being brought to the issues they face, and that solutions to these issues are identified. The role peak organisations play is equally as important as the role that service providers play, and their staff are considered as community sector workers.

**That is why the ACT Greens will undertake the necessary legislative reforms to ensure that staff in peak organisations are entitled to the Portable Long Service Leave Scheme where they are not already covered.**

## 2. ESTABLISHING A COMMUNITY RECOVERY CABINET COMMITTEE WITH MINISTERS AND SECTOR REPRESENTATIVES

**The Greens understand the need to improve community sector and government coordination. We will work with the sector to form a Community Recovery Cabinet to provide ongoing advice to government as we work towards a better normal.**

The Greens note that there appears to be less coordination between the ACT Government and the peak bodies of the sector than there has been in previous years. To properly face the challenges of the next four years, in a time of significantly reduced budgets but increased community demand, and with a public service that, like all of us, is experiencing the difficulties of living and working during the global health emergency that COVID 19 presents, we must work together better than ever before.

The ACT Greens want ongoing and robust feedback and support from the broader community sector on targeted interventions and development of responsive initiatives. We understand that it is in coordination with the sector that we can best assess the areas of community need. That is why we propose to establish a Community Recovery Cabinet that will allow the leaders of the relevant peaks and the responsible ministers and senior directorate officers to work together - to harness the real time feedback from those peaks that both represent individual frontline member organisations and provide systemic advocacy.

We expect that the composition of the Community Recovery Cabinet would include peak organisations such as ACTCOSS, ACT Shelter, Mental Health Community Coalition, Council of the Ageing, People with Disability, Youth Coalition, First Nations representation, the women's sector, Conservation Council and the business sector. It would operate as a committee of cabinet, with non-Executive members (ie. community sector representatives), and any member of the committee will be able to bring forward papers for discussion. Government will then be responsible, along with appropriate sector representatives, for implementation of joint decisions.

This will require a co-designed high-level partnership for it to work effectively together. The details will need to be determined in close cooperation with key sector bodies' feedback, alongside government directorate feedback, to ensure long-term workable relationships, decision-making and implementation abilities.

### **3. PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR THE COMMUNITY SECTOR TO ACCESS UP TO DATE TECHNOLOGY**

As the pandemic has evolved, all of us have learnt to become more reliant on technology in order to connect and go about our daily business. In many instances, working with clients has moved online and this has been a difficult journey for many community sector organisations, especially those with outdated technology. While many have been provided with the support to upgrade, it is important that this accessibility continues into the future as these practices become business as usual.

That is why the Greens will ensure that community sector organisations continue to have access to the technology, equipment and services they need, with a dedicated \$350,000 annual fund for technology upgrades.

### **4. SUPPORTING THE COMMUNITY SECTOR TO TRANSITION ITS FLEET TO ELECTRIC VEHICLES**

Climate change is a key pillar of ACT Greens policy and actions. Now that the ACT is running on 100% renewable electricity, the ACT Greens are keen to reduce our transport-derived emissions. The Greens understand the reliance that the sector has on private vehicles, especially in relation to home visits, support work and similar activities. Through the Greens work with Shane Rattenbury as Minister for Climate Change, we are pleased that the ACT Government has now committed to shifting all of its government car fleet to electric vehicles within 2 years.

The Greens will next support the community sector to transition its fleet to electric vehicles, as we work towards a Better Normal. This will also enable the benefits of reduced operating costs of zero emission vehicles for the sector.

## 5. GROWING AND BETTER SUPPORTING THE COMMUNITY SECTOR WORKERS IN HOUSING

Our previously announced [Home for All](#) package included an immediate 20% funding increase for all existing specialist homelessness services, developing a model for a youth-specific social housing service, establishing a First Nations led community housing organisation, funding to embed specialist workers\* in existing homelessness services, new beds in homelessness services, expanding the hours of the Early Morning Centre, funding for a tenancy advice service, increased funding for ACT Shelter and spending \$400m over four years on 1,000 new social and affordable housing dwellings.

**\*Specialist workers:** include people with qualifications and expertise in aged care, disability, mental health, and alcohol and other drugs, who will be embedded within existing services to support clients and staff during crisis as well as beyond.

## 6. DRIVING A GENDER-LED RECOVERY

Our [Gender-Led Recovery](#) package is informed by the need to build a better normal for women and this in turn will help us to build a stronger and better society. The Greens understand that providing more funding and more certainty for the community sector creates secure jobs. The sector is the third largest employer in the ACT and is made up predominantly of women who are approximately 80% of the workforce. Our gender-led recovery plan includes: increased supports for domestic, family and sexual violence; increasing the capacity of homelessness services; and ensuring well-funded systemic women's advocacy groups, including community legal centres, women's legal centres and the Women's Health Service.

## 7. INCREASING SUPPORT FOR THE COMMUNITY DRUG AND ALCOHOL SERVICES SECTOR

For many years, ATODA (Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT) - the peak body for drug and alcohol issues in the ACT - has been calling for increased investment in vital services on behalf of its 23 member organisations that provide treatment and services. It's time to listen. If, as a community, we want to be able to respond to the needs of people who seek support, treatment and rehabilitation in a timely way, then we have to put our money where it counts - in the community.

The ACT Greens [Reducing harm from drug and alcohol use](#) package calls for an immediate baseline funding boost to double the immediate annual funding for drug and alcohol treatment services to \$40 million, dramatically reducing long wait times for rehabilitation and detoxification services. This will fund therapeutic support services, including inpatient beds and improving existing infrastructure.

We will also work with the sector over the next 6 months on a genuine co-designed infrastructure audit of the entire specialist alcohol and other drug service system to inform infrastructure needs in the medium- and long-term. There have been ongoing pressures in the sector over decades, and also significant changes, such as the introduction of the Drug and Alcohol Court which needs ongoing support.