

# PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION

## INTRODUCTION

The Greens want Canberra to be a place where everyone can live, work, play, thrive and reach their full potential.

The Greens want a Canberra that is truly inclusive, where we create conditions for equal opportunities for all. We want a Canberra where people who are marginalised for any reason, by way of poverty, disability, age or cultural background can have a voice and feel that their contributions are valued.

We want a city that is inclusive and built in a way that everyone can get around that is disability friendly, safe and appropriate. This will also help aged people plus others like those who are heavily pregnant, caring for small children or sick people to get around.

We want a system that puts children and young people's needs first. All children and young people should be supported to have a safe, happy childhood that will set them up for their future life. The support must include the family of the children, and where it is safe, the child should live with their family.

The [ACTCOSS Cost of Living report, released in September 2020](#) tells us that approximately 30,000 Canberrans live below the poverty line. Many of these Canberrans are also dealing with other factors such as disability or age or other barriers that prevent them from equitably accessing goods and services.

Currently, people living in poverty, those with a disability, children, young people and carers face many obstacles to full participation in the community due to a variety of structural and systemic barriers that result from systems and planning that is designed for well-off, fully abled people.

Our systems are built on an assumption that everyone begins life from the same starting point. We know that is not so - not all children get a good start in life. First Nations children, children of parents with disability, children whose families do not have secure accommodation and children of parents with drug and alcohol issues or mental health issues tend to be over represented in the out of home care system.

The inequality is exacerbated by a lack of resources to support the family as well as lack of understanding of the complex issues some families face. In some cases this leads to families not seeking help because they fear that their children will be taken away from them. This can

lead to life long issues for children. Lack of education can lead to long term poverty and in some cases, contact with the justice system.

[The COVID pandemic has highlighted these existing inequalities](#), with more people reliant on government assistance, struggling with mental health issues, experiencing isolation and the impact of reduced services.

The Greens know that we need to change how we do things to create a new and better normal. Many of these changes are quite simple like designing accessible spaces without steps that help the whole community get around. Other changes to complex problems, like children having to enter out of home care require careful, considerate and community led approaches, that recognise that the systems and responses we create can have profound impacts on the lives of people in our city. We need restorative and therapeutic solutions that bring people together so that they can flourish.

### **THAT IS WHY THE ACT GREENS WILL IMPROVE SOCIAL INCLUSION BY:**

1. Making Canberra a better place to live for people with disability and limited mobility:
  - a. Conducting a review of and investing in flexible, community and on-demand bus services
  - b. Reviewing and increasing funding for the taxi subsidy scheme
  - c. Investigating discrimination by rideshare companies
  - d. Implementing a dedicated Access Committee for transport and urban planning
  - e. Requiring a proportion of all new houses to meet Universal Design Standards
  - f. Co-designing a Disability Health Strategy
2. Supporting carers and ensuring that their needs are understood and addressed:
  - a. Funding the ACT Carers Strategy
  - b. Providing greater access to respite for carers
  - c. Mandating carer awareness training for managers in the ACT Public Service

3. Improving the care and protection system and better supporting 18-21 year olds in the out of home care system:
  - a. Amend the Children and Young People Act to:
    - i. Create an external merits review system
    - ii. Develop a Charter of Rights for Parents and Families
    - iii. Ensure all reasonable steps have been taken to support family unity prior to making a care and protection order
    - iv. Establish the Children and Youth Services Council
  - b. Increasing support for family group conferencing
  - c. Providing access to supported decision making for parents with disability
  - d. Implementing the final Our Booris, Our Way report recommendations
  - e. Enshrining the right to extended care for 18-21 year olds in the care and protection system
  - f. Raising the age of criminal responsibility to 14 years, developing therapeutic diversions for young people and piloting throughcare support for young people exiting detention
  - g. Developing a youth-specific social housing service
  - h. Providing funding for Parentline telephone counselling, advice and assistance service for parents and carers
4. Reducing the burden of poverty, by:
  - a. Reviewing the tax reform changes in ACT rates and land tax systems to ensure they are fair and the tax burden is distributed fairly
  - b. Funding an ICRC investigation into the impacts of the ACT's rates and land tax systems
  - c. Reviewing the ACT Government targeted concession assistance measures to make sure that financial assistance is going where it is most needed
  - d. Further support to assist households with energy bills
5. Improving supports for multicultural communities by:
  - a. Increasing outreach to Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities for perinatal education
  - b. Introducing women specific swimming times for all ACT Government owned public pools
  - c. Consulting with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities on preventative health and translation of preventative health resources

## 1. MAKE CANBERRA A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY

The Greens understand that limited physical access to spaces and places creates barriers to participation and living a full life. Our plans to better support people with disability including addressing vital issues like transport and housing accessibility.

- a. The ACT Greens **will fund a review of community need for expanded flexible, community and on-demand bus services**, and identify the best options for future investment in expanded and innovative services to better meet the needs of people who cannot easily use public transport. This must be done with the community sector and include reconsideration of recommendations from the 2004/5 review into Wheelchair Accessible Taxis, and examine the findings of recent trials of on-demand services in Sydney. Investment in new services and/or more vehicles would be considered from the 2022 budget onwards.
- b. Review and increase **funding for the taxi subsidy scheme**

We will review the existing scheme and increase funding for the [ACT Taxi Subsidy Scheme](#) by **increasing the trip limit** and **increasing the monetary cap** to keep pace with increases in taxi fares. This review must also include reconsideration of recommendations from the 2004/5 review into Wheelchair Accessible Taxis. Ensuring access to the Taxi Subsidy Scheme helps Canberrans without independent transport to get around our city better.

- c. **Investigate discrimination by rideshare companies**

The Greens are concerned that rideshare companies have not made any accessible vehicles available to the Canberra community, and about reports that people who need assistance dogs are often simply not able to use rideshare cars. This issue must be resolved to ensure that Canberra has a fair and accessible rideshare scheme available for everyone.

- d. The ACT Greens will implement a **Dedicated Access Committee for transport and urban planning**. The Committee's membership will include people with a diverse range of disabilities, including women and people of diverse ages and backgrounds and will be embedded into government policy-making processes. This will improve the level of community involvement in infrastructure planning and ensure that the city is more accessible. To ensure suitable focus on transport and planning issues, the Committee's sole role will be access issues in our urban environment.

Universal access in urban areas enables all people to get where they need to, regardless of their age, gender or ability. It is about ensuring that people can move about the city freely and with independence. This includes walking and cycling, use of the bus and light rail network, as well as other transport services.

- e. The Greens want **a proportion of all new residential properties in the ACT to be built to meet Universal Design Standards** to make them accessible or adaptable to meet the housing needs of all people, including older people and people with disability. The Greens want the ACT to continue to advocate at COAG for National Construction Code changes to introduce national accessibility standards for residential housing. However, this process has already been underway for some time, and if national agreement on this reform cannot be reached in the near future, the Greens will push for the development of an ACT-specific Appendix to the Building Code of Australia to ensure that a proportion of new residential buildings in the ACT meet improved accessibility standards.

**The Greens want a government-led roundtable to discuss options with industry to achieve this.**

- f. **Co-designing a Disability Health Strategy**

The COVID pandemic has highlighted the precarious position of people with a disability and their equitable access to health services. **The Greens support the community sector's calls for a co-designed ACT Government Disability Health Strategy**, to improve the health system for people with a disability, and to provide better support to navigate the interface between health and disability service systems. In line with our previously stated approach for the community sector, this strategy should be co-designed with people with relevant lived experience and their advocates.

## 2. SUPPORT CARERS AND ENSURE THAT THEIR NEEDS ARE UNDERSTOOD AND ADDRESSED

There are around 50,000 unpaid carers in the ACT, whose needs are often overlooked and unconsidered. Carers need greater recognition and support for the work they do in keeping so many Canberrans safe, secure and cared for.

- a. The Greens want to implement the 25 actions contained in the [first three year Action Plan of the ACT Carers Strategy 2018-28](#) by properly funding it with \$1 million over 2 years to ensure that Carers themselves are also supported. This investment would enable [Carers ACT](#) to drive the policy and service changes required under the ACT Carers Strategy and assist the government to fulfil its commitment to carers. This will need review in 2022 to assess further progress needed.
- b. Providing greater access to **respite for carers**. It is estimated that 2.8 million Australians will provide informal care in 2020. This includes around 906,000 primary carers and 1.9 million non-primary carers who together provided nearly 2.2 billion hours of care in the year. The average hourly cost of employing a formal carer to replace an informal carer, with all relevant loadings, was [estimated to be \\$36.12 in 2020](#). Both for economic reasons and quality of life for carers and the person being cared for, respite care is needed to keep the system working.

### i. **Improving Respite for Mental Health Carers**

Sometimes carers of people with mental illness just need some time out to look after themselves and their own mental health. This is why we want increased access to respite services starting with a co-designed scoping and feasibility study to determine best options for an ACT Government funded respite facility for mental health carers.

ii. **Palliative care respite facility for carers**

The Greens have long advocated for more end-of-life choices and the ability to die with dignity. To better support people caring for their family and loved ones, we must in turn better support their carers. Carer stress and fatigue is identified as being a key barrier to people dying in the home, and that is why the Greens will support establishment of Palliative Care ACT's proposed respite service 'The Hub'. Through the COVID-19 Innovation Grants announced by Minister Rattenbury, Palliative Care ACT have been able to secure a temporary location for The Hub and are currently developing the business case for the respite service. The Greens will invest in a 4 bed facility, costing \$600,000 per annum for 4 years.

- c. The Greens will **mandate carer awareness training** for all managers in the ACT Public Service, to ensure that carers are treated fairly and without discrimination when balancing care responsibilities with their employment.

### 3. IMPROVING THE CARE AND PROTECTION SYSTEM AND BETTER SUPPORTING 18-21 YEAR OLDS IN THE OUT OF HOME CARE SYSTEM

We want a system that puts children and young people's needs first. All children and young people should be supported to have a safe, happy childhood that will set them up for their future life. The support must include the family of the children, and where it is safe, the child should live with their family. We will start all Care and Protection interventions by looking at the whole family and using restorative approaches to the care and protection system.

The ACT Greens support implementation of all of the recommendations of the [9th Assembly Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services Reports on the Inquiry into Child and Youth Protection Services](#) (CYPS).

a. **Amend the Children and Young People Act 2008 to:**

i. **Create an external merits review system**

ii. **Develop a Charter of Rights for Parents and Families**

The Greens want a more transparent system by presuming that children and families have the right to access more information about themselves, by amending the Children and Young People Act 2008 to ensure greater transparency, including instituting an external review of decisions, and developing a Charter of Rights for Parents and Families so that families and the community more broadly can have confidence in the system.

iii. **Ensure all reasonable steps have been taken to support family unity prior to making a care and protection order**

The Greens want the Children and Young People Act 2008 to specify an express requirement for the court to be satisfied that all reasonable steps have been taken to provide the services necessary to support family unity prior to making a care and protection order.

iv. **Establish the Children and Youth Services Council**

The Greens want a Children and Youth Services Council to be established in accordance with the provision in Part 2.2 of the Children and Young People Act 2008. The Council will be tasked with overseeing the implementation of the recommendations of the Health, Ageing and Community Services Committee Inquiry Reports into Child and Youth Protection Services.

b. The Greens will **increase support for family group conferencing and support for families** so that children do not end up in the child protection system in the first place. All families should have speedy access to well resourced Family Group Conferencing before child removal, except in emergency situations. No longer would we have the situation that children are removed without any warning to the rest of the family. The ACT Greens will increase continued funding for the family group conferencing program for families in the care and protection system.

c. **Provide access to supported decision-making for parents with disability, other vulnerable parents** and in particular for families where the CYPS system is involved. This includes support in hospital especially for mothers who are at risk of having their baby taken into care.



**d. Implement the final Our Booris, Our Way report recommendations**

The Our Booris Our Way review has outlined a path for the reform of the way our child protection system responds to the unique needs of First Nations families. While progress has been made since the review commenced, the Government response to some recommendations is still under consideration. The new government must continue work to implement all recommendations of the Our Booris Our Way review and provide regular progress reports. The Greens are committed to sustained efforts to ensure that we can achieve the holistic systems change required.

**e. Enshrine the right to extended care for 18 - 21 year olds in the out of home care system.**

The Greens are concerned about the lack of support for [young people in care between ages 18-21](#). Currently, if a young person in out of home care still lives with their foster family between the ages of 18 and 20, the family can apply for an Extended Continuum of Care subsidy. This is an unnecessary burden and can create tensions for young people seeking greater independence. We know that the life journey of a child with care and protection involvement will often be negatively impacted long after leaving care, and we believe that they should be able to access ongoing support as a matter of course, not be something they have to fight for. Simply knowing the care will continue can create greater stability. This simply aligns them with other young people living in “intact” families, many of whom have not left home at the age of 18.

[Studies have shown](#) that by providing this care, the number of young people experiencing homelessness is halved, their engagement with the youth or criminal justice system is reduced by 30%, hospitalisation rates are reduced by 30% due to better mental and physical health and employment and further education prospects are doubled.

- f. The Greens [Building Safer Communities](#) plan outlines our commitment to raise the age of criminal responsibility, reduce the number of young people in detention and pilot a three year throughcare support trial for young people exiting detention.
- g. The Greens [Home For All](#) package includes the development and funding of a model for a youth-specific social housing service.
- h. Providing funding for Parentline counselling service for parents and carers

The COVID pandemic has highlighted that now more than ever, families - especially those doing it tough, need extra support. The Greens will provide \$50,000 annual funding to Parentline to provide telephone counselling, advice and assistance to parents and carers



## 4. REDUCE THE BURDEN OF POVERTY, BY:

### a. **Reviewing the tax reform changes in ACT rates and land tax systems to ensure they are fair and the tax burden is distributed fairly**

The ACT Greens have supported the move away from transaction-based stamp duty to annual charges - rates - as a better way of funding annual government expenditure. After the Greens calling for a review of the impacts, in 2020 the [ACT Government released a review of the changes](#) and action is now needed on its findings and gaps, including:

- The review found that for many low income home-owners, government charges had gone up, not down, as they paid higher rates but were unlikely to purchase further houses and benefit from reduced stamp duty.
- The review did not consider the important issue of the correct balance of rates revenue between non-units (usually houses) and units (mostly townhouses and apartments). Rates rises have been much higher for units over recent years than for non-units. This has been intended to increase fairness between units and non-units, however many have argued that it has had unintended consequences. There is also a serious concern that as units grow as a proportion of the overall housing stock, a land value based rates system such as the ACT's is not able to maintain fairness. See for example the [NSW IPART Review of the Local Government Rating System 2016](#).
- The review did not adequately consider the incidence of land tax and its impact on renters.

### b. **Fund an ICRC investigation into the impacts of the ACT's rates and land tax systems**

ACT Greens MLA Caroline Le Couteur has long been concerned about [the inequity in our rates and land tax system](#). To address these issues, the ACT Greens want an **ICRC investigation into the impacts of the ACT's rates and land tax systems and potential changes**, in order to determine how to best target rates and land taxes towards fairness, especially for low income households and renters. The investigation should include the incidence of land tax, the [option of transitioning to an alternative \(market-value\) rates base](#), and options to address tax fairness for units.

**c. Reviewing the ACT Government targeted concession assistance measures to make sure that financial assistance is going where it is most needed**

The ACT Greens want a **review of [targeted concession assistance measures](#), including the current rates concessions, rebates and deferrals system**, to ensure concessions and rebates are adequate and well-targeted. The Greens believe this is necessary particularly since the COVID pandemic has increased hardship for many people affected by job loss and lack of income. This review must be undertaken with input from relevant community organisations working to support people in the community, and the rates section of the review should be undertaken after the ICRC investigation.

**d. Further support to assist households with energy bills**

The ACT Greens are committed to continuing the [energy concessions program](#), which supports low income households to pay their energy bills. We also understand that while energy efficiency retrofits are a sustainable way to reduce energy use and costs, concessions will still be required. We also support taking measures to increase energy literacy and awareness of concession eligibility.

The Greens will also implement the [ACT ICRC recommendations](#) to make it simpler for **ACT consumers to get better energy deals**. This requires electricity retailers to:

- Provide customers with a reference bill for a typical consumer to help consumers compare plans
- Notify customers if they have a plan that could reduce a customer's bills and ask the customer to call them for more information.

## 5. INCREASING SUPPORTS FOR MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITIES

**a. Increase outreach to Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities for perinatal education**

Non-government organisations are one of our most valuable assets in reaching and engaging a broad community to provide important health and wellbeing education, skills and resources. It's critical we continue to invest in our community in this way and continue to be innovative in how we do this. The Greens will provide an additional \$60,000 over four years to specifically target support for women from multicultural backgrounds and provide perinatal mental health education.

**b. Introducing women specific swimming times for all ACT Government owned public pools**

Some women and families currently do not use our public pools due to religious reasons, accessibility concerns, or for body image reasons. We want to see pools made more widely available to people who may not be able to use pools within typical times due to those reasons.

Providing women's only swimming times would increase the availability of swimming to a number of women and children in our community, both for safety, and for fun. The ACT Government owns and contracts out management of many public swimming pools, and we believe that each of these should be guided by a common policy that embeds women-only schedules as a standard.

**c. Consultation with culturally and linguistically diverse communities on preventative health and translation of preventative health resources**

Preventative health is crucial for all in society, however, to see such measures succeed it is important to target the health needs and education pathways for all groups in society. This means ensuring culturally diverse communities have access to health resources, information and education that they can understand and also is culturally sensitive. Statistically speaking, many people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds are at risk of health issues like obesity and this in turn increases their risk of chronic disease.

The Greens will provide \$1.5 million over four years to introduce a program to communicate and engage with CALD communities on preventative health.

We will also provide \$200,000 to ensure all educational materials can be translated and available for CALD communities online, in print and through targeted community communications.

## OTHER RELEVANT GREENS INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT VULNERABLE PEOPLE:

- The Greens [Home for All](#) package will **embed people with qualifications and expertise in disability into homelessness services** and increased **support for Disability Advocacy organisations** to provide both individual and systemic advocacy as outlined in our [Supporting the Community Sector](#) initiatives. This will include work to **improve the accessibility of crisis shelters** for women and others with disability in the ACT.
- The Greens plans for [walking and cycling](#) include a **dedicated access committee** to provide advice and feedback to the ACT Government on urban planning, transport design, and active travel issues.
- The Greens [Health](#) announcements include the development of a **Disability Health Strategy, a palliative care respite facility for carers and improving respite for mental health carers**.
- The Greens [Mental Health support package](#) includes **mental health innovation grants** which will include connecting people at risk of social isolation with activities, mental wellbeing programs in aged-care, art, music programs for children, young people or education sessions for parents.
- The Greens are committed to listening deeply to our First Nations people and in our [First Nations plan](#), the Greens are committed to **implementing the recommendations** from the final report from **Our Booris, Our Way** review committee.
- The Greens [Building Safer Communities](#) plan includes funding the implementing the [Disability Justice Strategy](#) and ongoing funding for **intermediaries** to meet the needs of both child and adult victim/witnesses with communication difficulties who are involved with the criminal justice system. It also delivers extra funding for the Human Rights Commission to provide support, advocacy and rights protection, particularly for vulnerable Canberrans.
- Our plans for a [Just Transition](#) include supporting people living in low-income households through the transition to low emissions housing, by supporting our community to afford to pay for energy bills, and ensuring that the homes they live in are affordable to run.