

# FREE AND ACCESSIBLE MENTAL HEALTHCARE

## A SAFE HAVEN IN EVERY DISTRICT, COMMUNITY YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES, EATING DISORDER SERVICES, AND PERINATAL MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

The Greens believe that every Canberran should have access to free, high quality healthcare when they need it. But we are in a cost of living and climate crisis. People are facing real existential threats, watching the destruction and horror of global conflicts in real time, and struggling to pay their bills.

There's a lot going on that is causing emotional and mental distress across Canberra. And we are seeing more demand than ever on our mental health system as people reach out for help. However, too many people only access care once they are in a crisis. That is simply too late and why we need more support earlier and in places where people feel comfortable to seek help.

The ACT Greens have a plan to ensure that every Canberran has access to the mental health care they need to live a healthy, fulfilling and hopeful life. Our goal is to provide a genuinely free and accessible mental health system all over Canberra - so you won't have to leave your neighbourhood to get help.

The ACT Greens want you to have access to support in your community, where you feel most comfortable. We need services available, accessible, free and close to home.

### THE ACT GREENS WILL:

- ▲ Deliver four new mental health Safe Havens across Canberra in Tuggeranong, Molonglo, Dickson and Gungahlin
- ▲ Expand the Police, Ambulance, Clinician Early Response (PACER) by building a safe place for people who need temporary out-of-home support
- ▲ Commence a Distress Brief Intervention trial, which will deliver social services support to address the issues that cause mental distress and can exacerbate someone's ill health
- ▲ Establish an eating disorder day program
- ▲ Deliver a dedicated eating disorder inpatient unit
- ▲ Permanently fund youth mental health services WOKE and Stepping Stones;
- ▲ Create youth-specific, drop-in safe space for those who are near or at crisis point with their mental health
- ▲ Create two new centres for perinatal mental health care

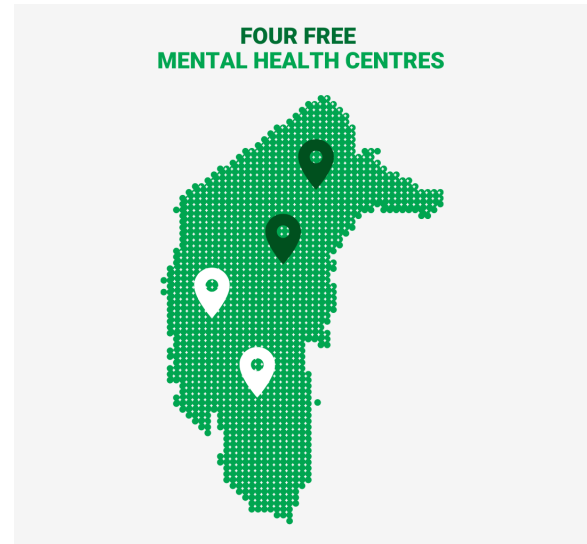
# A SAFE HAVEN IN EVERY TOWN CENTRE

## FREE MENTAL HEALTHCARE IN YOUR SUBURB

Truly accessible healthcare means being able to access support when you need it, where you need it, so you can continue to live your life to the fullest.

The current Belconnen mental health drop in centre (Safe Haven) supports people from all over the ACT. With more Canberrans feeling stress from the rising cost of living crisis, we need more places for people to seek support for their mental health and wellbeing.

Truly accessible mental healthcare means having free support close to home. So to meet this growing demand for more free mental health services, the ACT Greens will deliver a Safe Haven across every town centre. With one already in Belconnen and a second being established in Garran, we will roll out four more to Gungahlin, Dickson, Molonglo and Tuggeranong.



Safe Havens are a home-like environment for anyone feeling stressed, isolated or lonely to drop in and talk to peer workers about their experience. From here, the peer workers (who have lived experience with mental health illness) can discuss things that might work for you or refer you on to services or support groups.

Reports have found that people who visited the Belconnen Safe Haven reported better mental health outcomes after using the service, having improved their subjective units of distress (SUDS) score.

To better support people accessing Canberra's Safe Havens, we will also run our Distress Brief Intervention trial out of these centres, providing greater access to social services to address the causes

of emotional distress before it exacerbates someone's mental health condition.

- There are approximately 125,600 Canberrans with a mental health condition.
- Of those, young Canberrans 18-24 are less likely to receive treatment for their mental health.
- Mental illness has some of the highest impacts on daily living.

### WHAT'S THE INVESTMENT?

- \$3.2m establishing all four centres.
- \$11.65m operational costs across all four centres for four years.

# A SAFE PLACE FOR PACER

## A SHORT-STAY PLACE BETWEEN HOSPITAL AND HOME

Everyone deserves access to timely mental health support in their communities. It is where they feel most comfortable and trust others to seek help.

When people become distressed and their mental health worsens, the last place you want to be is in an emergency department. It is not homely, filled with people you don't know having their own health crisis and there is often a lengthy wait.

That's why the ACT Greens will expand PACER to deliver a safe, comfortable, non-clinical residential space to de-escalate people who are feeling heightened and need immediate, but not emergency support.

The PACER program has provided Canberrans with an integrated model of care, bringing together front-line services to provide safe assessment, treatment and referral of people who might be experiencing an acute mental health crisis in the ACT. It has reduced both avoidable hospital presentations and unnecessary contact with the justice

system for many people with mental health conditions.

A residential space for PACER will build upon the great work the program has already achieved by delivering free, quality support for people who need somewhere safe and home-like to de-escalate.

This service will be established in consultation with people with mental illness, carers and the community to ensure that it best supports the needs of the individual, their carer and their family.

### HOW WILL IT WORK?

Once the PACER team has assessed someone experiencing mental health distress, the clinician assesses their needs and level of care and decides whether the person should stay home, go to hospital or somewhere in between.

This space will include peer workers, link in with other existing services across a range of areas and provide respite and support to mental health carers.

It will provide both residential and mental health support for people experiencing mental distress for up to a week. Upon leaving, the service will ensure people are connected to other support services for their needs.

## WHAT'S THE INVESTMENT?

- \$4.85m inclusive of capital works and operational costs over four years.

# MORE EATING DISORDER SERVICES

## FILLING THE GAPS IN OUR HEALTH SYSTEM

For people to live well in the ACT, we must deliver free services relevant to their specific health needs.

For people with eating disorders, they often experience high levels of psychological and physiological distress. A person with an eating disorder has increased risks of developing long term mental and physical illnesses - including an increased risk of premature death due to medical complications and an increased risk of suicide.

The ACT's territory wide Model of Care for eating disorders is based on a stepped model of care. It was developed under a Greens Minister for Mental Health in consultation with people with lived experience, clinicians, and mental health organisations.

It includes services for early intervention, ongoing psychological care, a residential treatment centre, and inpatient medical stabilisation. It is all coordinated through

an Eating Disorders Clinical Hub, which opened in 2021.

The ACT Greens will deliver more services to support people with eating disorders: a day program to deliver a step up step down model with the residential centre; and an integrated inpatient care unit that combines medical stabilisation with psychological therapeutic care.

This means free access to specialised care for your eating disorder, no matter where you are in your journey.

## EATING DISORDERS DAY PROGRAM

The day program supports people to develop and apply their learnings, skills and tools to manage their eating disorder at home.

It will provide meal support, psychotherapy, and medical oversight for people who do not, or no longer, require an inpatient admission.

It will keep people connected with the support they need for their recovery journey.

It will also help carers and families build their skills, strategies and confidence to support their loved ones at home throughout their recovery journey.

## INTEGRATED INPATIENT UNIT

The ACT Greens will co-design a nation-leading integrated inpatient unit for eating disorders that combines medical stabilisation with psychological therapeutic care.

Across Australia, eating disorders are treated in a linear approach - usually physical health is cared for first, followed by mental health. This means medical stabilisation comes before psychological therapy, which can further exacerbate mental illness through traumatic health interventions, such as tube feeding.

Our plan is to address both sides of someone's condition simultaneously - to receive both medical stabilisation and psychological care at the same time.

Integrated care reduces trauma for the individual and accelerates the time to recovery. It has been successfully delivered in the UK for decades - it is proven to work and Australia needs to catch up.

The ACT Greens advocated for an ACT Minister for Mental Health. We have held the portfolio since it was created in 2016.

Our top achievements:

- Established the Territory's first Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing;
- Delivered a territory-wide model of care for eating disorders including building the first free residential centre in Australia;
- Established and expanded the Police, Ambulance, Clinician Early Response (PACER) service;
- Delivered a Safe Haven in Belconnen and funded a second hub in Garran;
- Delivered a range of youth mental health services;
- Funded services to reduce the devastating impacts of suicide in our community;
- Delivered early intervention services to tackle the stigma around mental health illness;
- Provided supported accommodation;
- Expanded mental health support for older Canberrans.

This is a transformational shift in how we better support and understand eating disorder treatment and management. We will co-design with people with lived experience, clinicians involved in medical stabilisation and psychological therapy, as well as academic experts to build the ACT's skills and expertise in eating disorder management.

### **WHAT'S THE INVESTMENT?**

- \$5.5m over four years to expand eating disorder services in the ACT.



# PERINATAL MENTAL HEALTH CARE

## AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE CARE FOR NEW PARENTS

- Around 1 in 5 new mums, and 1 in 10 new dads, experience perinatal mental health conditions.

Pregnancy, birth, and early parenting are cherished and important life experiences. We want all parents and families who choose to have children to have fulfilling and positive experiences as we know this achieves good outcomes for parents and children.

But it can be a challenging time. It changes routine, sleep patterns, your hormones and sometimes the way you do everyday things. Most perinatal services, like Tresillian, are costly and have lengthy wait times to access support for you and your family.

The ACT Greens will deliver more free services to parents in need of mental health or emotional support, earlier in their journey to give them and their family the best possible start.

## DEDICATED PERINATAL INPATIENT HOSPITAL CARE UNIT

The best outcomes for families come when they are supported as a whole, nurturing their relationships and helping them grow together.

Our plan will build and run a 6-bed acute inpatient perinatal mental health unit at the North Canberra Hospital - where parent and baby can stay together.

## A FREE HOME-LIKE CENTRE, CO-LOCATED WITH A DROP IN PERINATAL MENTAL HEALTH CENTRE

The ACT Greens will also co-design a Perinatal Step-Up Step-Down service where parents can get more support if they are at risk of becoming unwell, or transitioning back into the community from the in-patient unit, at a pace that best supports them and their family.

It will be a home-like, residential setting where parents and babies can stay together to nurture their bond.

This centre will also include a separate, but co-located, drop-in perinatal mental health centre similar to the Safe Haven in Belconnen. It will be a relaxing environment where any new parent in need can access no-cost peer mental health support.

## WHAT'S THE INVESTMENT?

- \$20.3m over four years to establish and operate this service.

# DISTRESS BRIEF INTERVENTION

## INTEGRATING SOCIAL SERVICES INTO MENTAL HEALTH CARE

Truly accessible mental health care means supporting the person as a whole and understanding how their daily experiences can impact their mental wellbeing before they reach a point of crisis.

The way we currently treat mental health is by treating the symptoms. But our mental health is heavily influenced by the things that happen in our day to day. For people with a mental illness, these things can exacerbate their condition into a crisis or suicidal behaviours and require hospitalisation.

That's why the ACT Greens will better integrate social services into our mental health system - to support the person as a whole, rather than just their symptoms.

Our plan is to establish a Distress Brief Intervention (DBI) trial, working in tandem with PACER and the Safe Havens.

The ACT Greens will also commission an independent review into this program, commencing within the first two years of its establishment.

## HOW WILL IT WORK?

DBI provides time-limited support for people in psychological distress. It will improve coordination, collaboration and cooperation across both the community and public health care settings.

It will support the individual as a whole. For example, if someone seeks mental health crisis support after a family member passes away, they can talk to someone about their experience and be linked with appropriate bereavement services.

That's why our plan will embed community support into mental health services to help people stay engaged and connected with services that are specific to their needs.

The DBI trial will include an ongoing training program for NGO community partners to: increase knowledge of the Connecting with People model to suicide prevention, incorporate tools to support people make safer choices, and improve coordination and handover between services.

DBI has been successfully delivered in Scotland and we will adapt this model to keep Canberra healthier, happier and living better in the community.

## WHAT'S THE INVESTMENT?

- \$3m to implement and evaluate the trial.

# COMMUNITY YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

## **FREE, ACCESSIBLE AND PERMANENT SERVICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

Every child, adolescent and young person has the right to a happy and healthy upbringing - where they feel safe, empowered and optimistic about their future.

But they are growing up during a challenging time. There is the existential threat of climate change, a genocide being broadcast in real time over social media, and a cost-of-living crisis where the dream of ever owning a home remains a fantasy.

The ACT Greens will support our young people early on in their developmental years to build their resilience, coping strategies and mental health literacy to help prevent mental health issues manifesting later in their lives.

Our plan is to increase free access to services by permanently funding youth mental health programs and developing a new crisis drop-in centre for young people.

## **PERMANENT FUNDING FOR WOKE AND STEPPING STONE**

The ACT Greens will permanently fund community mental health services, WOKE and Stepping Stones, to ensure any young Canberrans can access free mental health support earlier in their health journey.

Ongoing funding for these programs will mean they can continue to grow and expand with Canberra's population.

WOKE is the only no-cost dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT) program in the ACT for young people 15-21 who display early signs of borderline personality disorder.

Stepping Stones supports children 0-12 who have been exposed to trauma and their families recover and back on the best trajectory to live well as they grow.

Yet in 2023 the Federal Labor Government ceased funding for these services. With a Greens Mental Health Minister in the ACT, we stepped in to ensure these vital services can continue to support young people in need.

## **A NEW YOUTH DROP IN CENTRE**

Young people need somewhere safe, free and easy to travel to in Canberra for

when they start to feel emotionally and mentally overwhelmed.

The ACT Greens will establish and pilot a no-cost, drop-in youth crisis service, similar to Circle in the UK, to support young people who are experiencing or nearing a mental health crisis.

Our plan will ensure young people in Canberra have somewhere safe to go to seek mental health support. It will be a welcoming and homely safe space, similar to the Safe Haven in Belconnen, for both drop in and appointment-based mental health support.

The physical space will include areas for:

- Two or more therapy rooms for 1-1 consultations and meetings,
- A sensory area,
- Open floor areas for groups and workshops,

- A cafe welcoming reception area

And it will be located somewhere that is easily accessed by public transport.

The program will also provide a space where young people and concerned parents can be supported and guided to appropriate services.

Connecting people with the right services at the right time will reduce the need for intensive mental health care later on and get back to living life to the fullest.

### WHAT'S THE INVESTMENT?

- \$3.12m to permanently fund WOKE and Stepping Stones during the next term of Government.
- \$3.2m to establish and operate the youth crisis service.