## 2021-22 ACT Budget Consultation

To help us frame the ACT 2021-22 Budget, we sought input from all Canberrans on the prioritisation and efficient allocation of government resources, and how best to deliver community services.

July 2020 saw the Chief Minister, Andrew Barr MLA, deliver a Ministerial Statement to the Territory’s Legislative Assembly presenting what would be the first of many updates detailing plans for economic survival and recovery in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It goes without saying that the pandemic represents the greatest economic and health challenge to the ACT since self-government, requiring significant investment in health and essential services to keep Canberrans employed, to protect households and families, and to support our local businesses. We will continue to offer targeted support in response to emerging pandemic circumstances and are maintaining close links with community and non‑government organisation partners in identifying where services are needed and supporting them in addressing increased service demand.

Our support packages, by nature of their design, have reduced revenue collection and increased expenditure, and the return to a balanced budget will be prolonged. Significant expenditure has been necessary to prepare a strong foundation for the rebuilding of our economy, while simultaneously investing in our future.

Running in tandem with the pandemic health response, the ACT Government has invested to protect and support Canberrans throughout this period of uncertainty, while seeking opportunities to reinvigorate and strengthen our economy. We now have one of the strongest economies in Australia, and we are continuing to maintain and generate jobs consistent with ourplan to expand our labour market to 250,000 jobs by 2025.

There remains much to do. Attention towards emerging markets and our own sectors of competitive advantage will drive new employment opportunities for the ACT. The Chief Minister has recently announced plans to revise the Territory’s $14 billion Infrastructure Plan in response to pandemic conditions, providing a pipeline of work and investment certainty for industry. Lessons learnt from the pandemic response will inform new initiatives for the delivery of community and health services, ensuring our vulnerable and those in need are being looked after.

The Budget consultation process provides an important opportunity for the community to be involved in the implementation of all areas of government service delivery, as well as suggesting new and better ways to get things done. Working together, we can ensure that our limited resources are put to their most efficient use. We welcome your ideas as to the services that you or your organisation need, and those that you want the government to deliver.

## THE CONVERSATION

We invited ideas to help inform the priorities for the 2021-22 ACT Budget

Between 1 April and 28 June 2021, we invited community members, businesses, and local organisations to share their ideas for the 2021‑22 Budget via the completion of an online survey, or by providing written submissions through the [Budget Consultation](https://yoursay.act.gov.au/budget-consultation) project page on [YourSay](http://www.yoursay.act.gov.au). Input on the 2022-23 Budget was invited until 29 October 2021.

We published the survey responses and submissions, except those provided in confidence, on our [Input Received](https://www.budgetconsultation.act.gov.au/input-received) page.

## WHO ENGAGED

Written submissions were received from 104 ACT residents, community and business groups, unions and other stakeholders, while 75 people responded to our survey questions. A further nine individuals or organisations wrote in to support a proposal.

The submissions and survey responses covered a diverse range of issues, including arts and entertainment, community services, disability, education, our environment and sustainability, health, public infrastructure and transport, as well as matters relating to the Territory’s finances.

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| Key insights from the community |
| Health services   1. As has been the case for several years, health services received the highest degree of commentary, reflecting its importance in terms of overall government service delivery. Input was broad in nature, highlighting the range of services sought by Canberrans, as well as the services offered by organisations to the community. 2. The importance of mental health related services was noted, and a number of organisations and individuals raised the need for health-related education programs and early intervention or diversionary services. |
| Community services and housing   1. Feedback in relation to the broad range of community services provided by the ACT Government was received, including disability support, domestic violence prevention, and support services for our youth and seniors. 2. Housing affordability and social housing were key topics identified by a number of organisations and individuals. This includes highlighting linkages between housing availability and the broader wellbeing of the community, including the flow-on impacts of rental stress or potential homelessness. 3. Similar to recent years, a broad range of community sector organisations provided valuable input on opportunities for service delivery improvement, and highlighted the services they provide, ranging from disability education and assistance, to crisis response, through to advocacy and engagement activities. |
| Government policy   1. Input offered suggestions as to elements of the ACT Government’s existing policy framework that could be modified or enhanced across several areas. Broad themes included the COVID-19 pandemic response and support initiatives, housing affordability, urban planning, and the need for integration across different areas of government in terms of service delivery. 2. Feedback indicated the community’s preference for simplification of regulation activities, early engagement on new ACT Government projects, and using the knowledge base of community-based service providers in policy development and delivery. The availability of online services was noted as positive, while other input asked that a physical presence be maintained (e.g. Access Canberra shopfronts) for those without ready access to IT or simply a preference for face-to-face interaction. |
| Public infrastructure and roads   1. Public infrastructure and roads received commentary given their capacity for influencing the amenity of our city, and the ease with which we conduct our lives and simply ‘get around’. Several submissions highlighted the need for active travel networks across our city, particularly our cycling and footpath network, and also promoted the health benefits associated with active travel. 2. Commentary also highlighted specific infrastructure projects for the Government’s consideration, including specific road upgrades, facilities for town centres, and planning. It was noted that road design should aim to incorporate cyclist and pedestrian safety as a key design and planning consideration. |
| Environment and the city amenity   1. Consultation participants clearly highlighted the importance of green spaces in our city and surrounds and the associated amenity benefits. Input also noted the importance of addressing climate change and emissions reductions, both in terms of urgency and future policy design. 2. Other areas of note included accelerating the take-up of electric vehicles and solar technologies, and the need for the Government to actively promote sustainability, recycling, and the use of renewables to assist in the reduction of our environmental impacts. |
| Education   1. Feedback emphasised the importance of the ACT Government providing a strong foundation for the Territory’s children, particularly in terms of early childhood education and support. 2. Respondents indicated the government should be working to ensure that teachers are supported in their roles, with appropriate but modern facilities and opportunities for career development, while students should have ready access to support services to assist their learning (such as mental health and counselling). |
| Public transport   1. Consultation participants provided input regarding the Territory’s public transport networks, and there was largely positive feedback regarding current light rail operations and future extension of the light rail network. 2. Feedback also raised the importance of access to the public transport network for the elderly and people with disability. |
| Other topics   1. Other topics raised included arts, entertainment and cultural facilities (including support for the sector in response to COVID-19 restrictions), promotion of tourism opportunities (such as cycling tourism), and the benefits anticipated from the progressive expansion of the Government’s wellbeing policy framework. |

## What’s Next?

We have used your ideas to help inform the priorities for the ACT’s 2021-22 Budget.

Thank you to everyone who provided feedback. The 2021‑22 Budget is available online and may be viewed at: <https://www.treasury.act.gov.au/budget/budget-2021-22/budget-papers>.

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| THANK YOU FOR YOUR FEEDBACK\* | | |
| 104  written submissions  received | **75**  responses to the  online survey | **3,436**  unique visitors to our  Input Received page |
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| \*As at the time of preparation of this report. The Input Received page had received 1,984 unique page visits over the period 1 April to 28 June 2021 (i.e. from the opening to the formal close of the 2021-22 Consultation period). | | |