

Media release

EMBARGOED until 5am Friday 24 October 2025

Cost-of-living pressures a key driver in escalating demand for community services

The ACT Council of Social Services (ACTCOSS) today released their factsheet – *Demand for ACT community services: Findings from the 2025 State of the ACT Community Sector Survey*, revealing a sharp rise in demand for community services across the Territory.

“The findings of this survey reinforce what ACTCOSS and the sector has been consistently highlighting – demand for community services is rising sharply,” said Dr Devin Bowles, ACTCOSS CEO.

“In 2024, a striking 83% of community organisations reported an increase in demand, a significant jump from 67% in 2022,” Dr Bowles said.

The survey identifies the top three drivers of this increased demand as cost-of-living pressures, lack of access to affordable housing and/or experiences of homelessness and inadequate mental health support.

“Community organisations are not only managing higher overall demand but are supporting clients with more complex needs. In 2024, 76% of organisations reported a rise in client complexity – a notable increase from 69% in 2022, indicating a continuing and accelerating upwards trend,” Dr Bowles said.

The survey identifies the top five changes contributing to driving this rise in complexity as the increase in mental health conditions, insecure housing, overcrowding and/or homelessness, poverty, family and domestic violence and difficulty accessing government supports.

“Despite the ACT’s reputation as a wealthy jurisdiction, the survey reveals a deeply concerning surge in poverty across the ACT. In 2022, 56% of respondents observed an increase in levels of poverty and disadvantage. By 2024, this figure had surged to a staggering 82%,” Dr Bowles said.

“This survey’s findings demonstrate the long-term worsening of socioeconomic conditions facing many Canberrans, with community organisations playing a critical role in responding to basic community needs. But the sector can’t keep up with this increasing demand.”

“Many community organisations (52%) are telling us that there has been an increase in the number of clients their service couldn’t support, over half reported longer waiting times and 16% reported closing their waiting lists during 2024 because they could not take on any more clients within their available resources.”

“This growing demand is having a direct and concerning impact on our community. In 2024, 27% of organisations turned people away, while a third were forced to refer clients to other organisations, many of which are also under significant pressure.”

“The survey also reveals the extent to which government services rely on the community sector, with one in three organisations receiving urgent referrals from government services outside of normal business hours.”

“ACTCOSS welcomes the opportunity to work with government and stakeholders to strengthen the community sector’s capacity to meet growing demand. The survey’s findings reflect the resilience and dedication of community organisations, but also highlight the need for thoughtful, long-term investment to ensure no one in the ACT is left behind,” concluded Dr Bowles.

“Raising rates of mental illness points to the need for further investment in prevention and early intervention services. We know that we have an unmet need for services that can support recovery and community engagement for people who have experienced an episode of mental ill-health and without investment in this we will continue to see increasing demand and a lack of access” said Ms Lisa Kelly, CEO of the Mental Health Community Coalition. “We recognise and thank the community mental health providers who work hard every day to support as many people as possible”.

“This survey makes clear that the housing affordability crisis is one of the biggest factors driving demand across Canberra’s community services. Eighty-one per cent of community organisations identified lack of affordable housing and homelessness as a key factor driving more people through their doors, and three in four organisations said housing instability is also driving greater complexity in people’s needs. When people can’t find or afford a home, every other challenge — from mental health to family violence — becomes harder to manage. We urgently need sustained investment in social and affordable housing, alongside more joined-up supports that keep people housed and prevent crisis before it starts,” said Ms Corinne Dobson, CEO of ACT Shelter.

This factsheet highlights the key findings about the demand for community services in the ACT and factors driving this demand. The survey responses offer a snapshot of the ACT community sector and the full State of the Community Sector Report will be released in the final quarter of 2025.

Press conference

When: 9:30am Friday 24 October 2025

Where: Outside the Legislative Assembly, Civic Square, 180 London Cct, Civic ACT

Who: Dr Devin Bowles (CEO of ACTCOSS); Corinne Dobson (CEO of ACT Shelter) and Lisa Kelly (CEO of Mental Health Community Coalition ACT).

ACTCOSS advocates for social justice in the ACT and represents not-for-profit community organisations. Follow us @ACTCOSS on X, Facebook and Instagram.

[ACT Shelter](#) is a not-for-profit peak body providing an informed and independent voice on housing policy issues affecting the ability of Canberrans on low, moderate or no incomes to have an affordable, safe and secure home.

**For more information or comment, please contact:
Dr Devin Bowles, CEO, ACTCOSS, on 0413 435 080.**

*Authorised by Dr Devin Bowles on behalf of the
ACT Council of Social Service Inc (ACTCOSS)*