

# Disability Services

ACT Labor believes that people living with a disability should be given the opportunity and support to achieve their full potential and be valued as equal participants in our community.

There are approximately 45,000 people with a disability living in the ACT.

When Labor came to Government, we inherited an under-resourced and neglected disability sector. The Gallop report provided a clear demonstration that changes needed to be made, that major investment was required and that reforms across the entire system were long overdue.

Since coming to government ACT Labor have completely reformed disability services. Not only have we invested an additional 69% to the annual budget for disability services, we have also changed the way we work. We have implemented new and innovative models of care that meet the needs of people with a disability, their families and carers.

Over the past few years there have been significant improvements in the disability sector with more people receiving support, more flexibility in the care provided and an increased focus on meeting individual needs. Despite these improvements, demand for disability services continues to grow each year and meeting this demand across all age groups remains a challenge for government.

ACT Labor understands the challenges that we face as a community in providing quality support to people with a disability, their families and to carers. ACT Labor has already put in place measures to deal with these challenges, but there is more to be done.

ACT Labor will continue to invest in disability services to ensure that we are able to meet the current and future needs of people with a disability.

**Jon Stanhope**  
Chief Minister

**Katy Gallagher**  
Deputy Chief Minister and  
Minister for Disability and Community  
Services

### A Proud Record of Investment in Disability Services

Labor has:

- Increased funding to disability services by 69% since 2001 - rising from \$40 million to \$62 million in 2008-09.
- Provided an additional \$15.75 million in the 2007-08 Budget representing the biggest increase in disability funding since self-government.
  - This funding has contributed to the provision of additional recurrent support services for 60 people, 20 accommodation support places, over 20,000 hours of community access, and over 1,000 bed nights in centre-based respite care.
- Successfully lobbied the Commonwealth Government to match the \$15.75 million ACT Government commitment, which will provide another 60 people with new and increased support funding.
- Increased funding to therapy services by 106% from \$4.9 million to \$10.2 million.
- Increased investment in Individual Support needs for people with a disability from \$5.3 million to \$10.6 million.
- Established a Commissioner for Disability and Community Services
- Provided \$768,000 per year for respite services for older adults.
- Allocated \$500,000 per year for the establishment of the Local Area Co-ordination Service to assist people with a disability to become active participants in the community.
- Provided an additional \$410,000 for special needs support for clients with complex needs.
- Provided additional investment of \$1 million each year for those young people who leave school and require some form of ongoing or transition support.
- Provided \$1.8 million to assist young people with a disability out of aged care accommodation.
- Invested \$4 million in building a single therapy service including the redevelopment of existing Therapy ACT sites.
- Provided \$2.4 million to establish the first equipment loan service for children and young people.
- Invested \$1.242 million per year for an intensive care and treatment program for people with dual disabilities and complex behaviours.
- Allocated \$4.1 million over four years for a Screening Program for Vulnerable People.
- Developed Quality of Life grants of \$100,000.
- Developed a specialist accommodation service, for people who have an acquired brain injury, for an additional \$440,000 per year

### Moving Forward

A re-elected ACT Labor Government will;

- Provide Targeting Speech - \$3.6 million to employ more therapists  
ACT Labor recognises that more can always be done for our children and young people who require therapy services.

Over the past 2 years there has been a significant increase in the numbers of referrals to Therapy ACT for children requiring speech therapy.

ACT Labor acknowledges that the waiting list for speech therapy for young children must be addressed. We must respond to this emerging area of need.

ACT Labor will employ an additional 8 speech therapists to meet the demand for speech therapy for young children. These additional therapists will provide increased services including assessment, training, support and referral, for children with a range of disabilities.

- Establish an annual \$500,000 Flexible Support Fund  
ACT Labor will increase the current annual pool available for grants to people with a disability and carers by \$200,000 to create a new universal grants pool of \$500,000.

The fund will be available for a whole range of projects that could include support, respite, counseling, recreation opportunities, community access, vocational education and skills training, research and policy development for carers, and equipment used to improved the quality of life for people with a disability or a carer.

This flexible support fund will have two application rounds every year for \$250,000. While the guidelines for applications will be flexible and enable applications for a wide variety of projects, applications would be capped at \$5,000 per application, allowing up to 100 different projects to be supported each year.

The fund will be established by providing an additional \$200,000 per annum in new funding and by incorporating the Quality of Life Grants (currently \$100,000pa) and the Carer's Recognition Grants (currently \$200,000pa).

- Provide \$400,000 over four years to introduce a Companion Card for people with a disability and their carers.

ACT Labor will introduce a companion card in the ACT. A Companion Card is a formal arrangement where participating entertainment and recreational venues, groups and businesses provide entry to an event or activity free or at a reduced cost to the companions of people with a disability.

The Companion Card is issued to people with a significant, permanent disability, who can demonstrate that they are unable to access most community activities and venues without attendant care support.

Three States already have the scheme in place and it is time for the ACT to provide this additional level of support.

ACT Labor believes that a companion card is a low-cost idea that encourages the inclusion of people with a disability, and supports community and business leaders to drive positive change for people with a disability.

ACT Labor would seek to model the local scheme on the Victorian model, which is also used in WA and would attract reciprocal rights.

The Companion Card is not a new responsibility. Discount scheme, or a concession, is a formal way to support people with a disability accessing their entitlement to a discrimination-free lifestyle.

The funding allocated to the Companion Card will allow the establishment of the scheme and some ongoing administrative and promotional support.

ACT Labor believes that small and supportive community like the ACT will embrace the Companion card wholeheartedly

- Provide \$1.9 million for more playgroups at Therapy ACT

Therapy ACT provides a vital diagnostic and therapeutic role for children and young people diagnosed with a disability. ACT Labor recognises that children with disabilities and their families need more support, and that playgroups provide an opportunity for parents to learn and play with their children at the same time.

ACT Labor understands that parents of children with a disability need more assistance when their children are young. We know that the increase in referrals to Therapy ACT for children with a range of support needs continues to rise. We also understand the importance of early intervention and providing opportunities for learning in those vital early years of a child's life.

Over the past 12 months we have seen an 12% increase in the number of referrals to Therapy ACT and the majority of those referred are for children aged between 2 and 4.

ACT Labor will respond to these increases and provide \$1.9 million to provide additional playgroups sessions for pre-school aged children referred to Therapy ACT. This additional investment will fund 4 play therapists to run the specialised playgroups on the north side and south side of Canberra.

These playgroups will give the children opportunity to learn in a group environment whilst also providing parents with vital tools to continue the learning at home.

- Continue to focus on meeting unmet need

ACT Labor will continue the work already begun to measure unmet need in the disability sector. ACT Labor has already been able to invest an additional \$30 million into support funding for people with a disability due to our accurate and honest measurement of need in the ACT.

This analysis goes right across all age groups but focuses on meeting the needs of children, young people leaving school, people with new and acquired disabilities and individuals being supported by ageing parents.

Ongoing understanding and quantifying the level of need for support services in our community will assist the government to target our investment in the areas that it is needed.