



SENATOR DAVID POCOCK
Senator for the ACT

The Hon Daniel Mulino MP
Assistant Treasurer
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Assistant Treasurer,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this pre-budget submission outlining priorities from the ACT, Norfolk Island and Wreck Bay communities ahead of the 2026–27 Federal Budget.

This submission reflects extensive engagement with constituents, community organisations, service providers, researchers and advocates over the past few years. It is grounded in the lived experience of people facing acute cost-of-living pressures, as well as in evidence about the long-term economic and fiscal benefits of investing early, fairly and strategically.

At its core, this submission calls for housing to be treated as a human right and as essential economic and social infrastructure. Housing insecurity is driving hardship across the ACT and nationally, with particularly severe impacts on young people, renters and those on low incomes. Addressing this crisis requires not only increased investment in social and affordable housing, but a coordinated national approach that prioritises prevention, stability and long-term outcomes.

Beyond housing, the submission focuses on five further priority areas: social infrastructure, health and aged care, energy and the environment, strengthening the social safety net and supporting small businesses. ACT residents want to see investments in community infrastructure, preventative health care, home-based aged care, clean energy access and environmental protection reduce pressure on hospitals, crisis services and budgets over time, while improving participation, productivity and wellbeing.

Importantly, this submission also recognises the need for budget sustainability. Alongside targeted investments for those who need them most, it proposes serious and credible reforms to improve the budget bottom line and reduce structural pressures, including reforms to property tax concessions and fuel tax credits. Taken together, these measures demonstrate that it is possible to improve fairness and outcomes while strengthening the Commonwealth's fiscal position.

Budgets are statements of priorities. The 2026–27 Budget is an opportunity to make choices that ease cost-of-living pressures now, prevent avoidable harm, and deliver lasting economic and social returns. I urge the Government to use this Budget to show leadership in these areas.

I thank the many individuals and organisations who contributed to the development of this submission, and I would welcome the opportunity to discuss any of its proposals further.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to engage on any of the matters raised.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Pocock'.

David Pocock
Independent Senator for the ACT

30 January 2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

HOUSING AS A HUMAN RIGHT

Addressing Youth Homelessness in the ACT

National Youth Housing Supplement

Fund a Dedicated Youth Homelessness Shelter in the ACT and Strengthen National Youth Crisis Supports

Deliver a National Housing and Homelessness Plan. Scale up Social Housing Investment and Treat Housing as a Human Right

Reform Property Tax Concessions to Support Housing Affordability and Fairness

SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Community sporting infrastructure

East Rugby Women's change room

Investing in Viking Park - A stadium for Canberra's south

Convention Centre Funding

Norfolk Island Knowledge and Learning Centre

Canberra-to-Sydney Rail Upgrades

Multicultural Centre Funding

HEALTH AND AGED CARE

Invest in a Gynaecological Cancer Transformation Initiative

Increase Funding for Support at Home to Deliver Timely, Fully Funded Aged Care at Home

Extend Paid Parental Leave for Families with Premature and Sick Babies

ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT

Extend Solar Sharer to ACT Residents

Electrification and renters

Funding for Conservation of the Western Edge of Canberra

Active Travel Infrastructure

Invasive Species Solutions Research Fund

Long-term, Sustainable Funding for the CSIRO

Reinstate the Threatened Species Recovery Hub

National Centre for Long-Term Ecological Monitoring

Fuel Tax Credits

Lift National R&D Investment and Strengthen Australia's Science System

Reforming the Petroleum Rent Resource Tax

A SAFETY NET THAT KEEPS PEOPLE SAFE

Invest in Community Legal Centres to Deliver Access to Justice

Lift Income Support to Reduce Poverty and Improve Economic Inclusion

Increase Funding for Frontline Family and Domestic Violence Services

Expanding and increasing paid placement support to address placement poverty

Reforming the failed Job Ready Graduates Scheme

SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT

Making instant asset write off permanent

Digitisation tax incentives for small businesses

Support for Civic small businesses impacted by light rail

HOUSING AS A HUMAN RIGHT

Addressing Youth Homelessness in the ACT

National Youth Housing Supplement

Young people across the country, including here in the ACT, are facing a deepening housing crisis, with homelessness services unable to meet even the most basic need for safe, stable accommodation. In 2024–25, **677 unaccompanied young people aged 15–24 accessed homelessness services in the ACT**, yet **almost half (316 young people)** were still homeless when their support ended. This reflects a system constrained not by effort, but by a critical lack of housing options.

The shortage is most stark in longer-term housing. In 2024–25, **392 young people aged 15–24 sought long-term accommodation**, but **only 28 were provided with housing**. Nearly **one in two young people (49%) missed out entirely**, receiving neither housing nor a referral. This represents a significant deterioration from the previous year and points to a rapidly worsening crisis for young people in the ACT.

Nationally, around **15,000 unaccompanied young people each year require but do not receive medium- or long-term housing**. The Home Time Youth Housing Coalition has identified the **Youth Housing Penalty** - the lower rental income generated by young people on Youth Allowance - as a key structural barrier preventing community housing providers from offering tenancies to young people.

This penalty means that young people are largely excluded from benefiting from things like the social properties being delivered under the federal government's Housing Australia Future Fund.

The Home Time Youth Housing Coalition's proposed **Youth Housing Supplement** provides a targeted, scalable solution. The Supplement would be paid directly to community housing providers to bridge the rental gap for young tenants, making it financially viable to allocate housing to young people at the point they need it most.

The Home Time proposal recommends an initial **national investment of \$7.266 million in 2026–27**, supporting **1,400 young people** across Australia. As new social and community housing comes online, the Supplement would scale to **\$31.8 million per year by 2029–30**, supporting over **6,000 tenancies nationally**. This very modest investment would unlock existing housing supply, reduce youth homelessness, and deliver strong long-term social and economic returns.

Without Commonwealth leadership, young people in the ACT and across Australia will continue to be turned away from housing, entrenching homelessness and driving avoidable long-term costs to government.

I call on the Commonwealth to commit \$7.266 million in the 2026–27 Budget to implement a national Youth Housing Supplement, scaling over the forward estimates, to remove the Youth Housing Penalty and ensure unaccompanied young people - including those in the ACT - can access stable, long-term housing and exit homelessness permanently.

Fund a Dedicated Youth Homelessness Shelter in the ACT and Strengthen National Youth Crisis Supports

Young people experiencing homelessness in the ACT face a significant gap in crisis support. Despite rising youth homelessness and increasing pressure on Specialist Homelessness Services, the ACT remains **the only jurisdiction in Australia without a dedicated youth homelessness shelter**. This leaves unaccompanied young people with few safe, age-appropriate options when they have nowhere else to go.

Youth homelessness is not simply a housing issue; it is a critical early-intervention challenge. Young people experiencing homelessness are at heightened risk of violence, exploitation, mental distress, disengagement from education and employment, and long-term homelessness. Crisis responses designed for adults are often unsafe or inappropriate for young people, particularly those under 18 or transitioning out of care, family violence or other traumatic circumstances.

In the absence of a dedicated youth shelter, young people in the ACT are frequently placed in unsuitable adult accommodation, overcrowded short-term options, or turned away altogether. At the same time, many young people in housing crisis do not know where to turn for help, or are unable to access timely support when they reach out. National helpline services, such as **Kids Helpline**, play a vital role as a first point of contact for young people experiencing homelessness, family breakdown and mental health distress, yet demand continues to outstrip capacity.

Helpline services provide accessible, confidential support and early intervention, often preventing crises from escalating. However, under-resourcing and limited public awareness mean too many young people are unable to get through when they need help most, or are unaware that these services exist.

I've heard horrific stories from young people in the ACT waiting hours to get through on the helpline, and in one case of a young person suiciding while on hold, of having to sleep rough after leaving an unsafe home environment and

Every other state and territory has recognised the importance of dedicated youth crisis accommodation as a core component of their homelessness response. Similarly, national investment in youth helplines and clear, youth-appropriate communication is essential to ensure young people can access help early, regardless of where they live.

A coordinated approach - combining **place-based crisis accommodation, well-resourced national helpline services**, and a **targeted advertising and communications campaign** - would significantly strengthen Australia's youth homelessness response. It would improve safety, support earlier intervention, and create clearer pathways into housing and support services.

I call on the Commonwealth to work with the ACT Government to fund and establish at least one dedicated youth homelessness shelter in the ACT, and to increase national funding for youth helpline services, including Kids Helpline, alongside a targeted communications campaign to ensure young people know where and how to access help when they are in crisis.

Deliver a National Housing and Homelessness Plan, Scale up Social Housing Investment and Treat Housing as a Human Right

Australia's housing and homelessness crisis is deepening, yet national policy settings remain fragmented, short-term and reactive. While recent Commonwealth investments have helped stabilise parts of the system, Australia still lacks a clear, long-term **National Housing and Homelessness Plan** that sets targets, aligns funding, and provides certainty to governments, investors and service providers.

In June 2024 I introduced a bill - the National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024 - that would do just that, building on the years' worth of consultation the federal government has undertaken without producing an agreed plan.

At its core, this is a question of values as well as policy. Safe, secure housing is a fundamental human right and the foundation for health, education, economic participation and community wellbeing. Treating housing as a human right in policy making requires governments to move beyond crisis responses and commit to sustained, coordinated action to ensure everyone has access to an affordable home.

Senator David Pocock has introduced legislation to establish a **National Housing and Homelessness Plan**, recognising that enduring progress requires a whole-of-government, whole-of-system approach. A national plan would provide a framework to better coordinate action and investment across the Commonwealth, states, territories and local government, set measurable national targets for social and affordable housing supply, and ensure accountability for reducing homelessness over time.

The need for this approach is well established. The OECD's 2026 Economic Survey of Australia warns that **investment in social and affordable housing has been weak** and that the **Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF), while welcome, is unlikely to be sufficient to reverse the long-term decline in social housing as a share of total housing stock**. The OECD explicitly recommends substantially increasing public investment in social and affordable housing to protect vulnerable households while easing pressure across the broader housing market.

The HAFF has provided an important starting point, but uncertainty remains about what comes next. With demand far outstripping supply, and future housing needs locked in by population growth and decades of underinvestment, the Commonwealth must signal a clear pathway beyond **HAFF round 3**. Without a sustained pipeline of investment, coordination between governments will remain ad hoc, delivery capacity will be constrained, and opportunities to reduce homelessness at scale will be missed.

A National Housing and Homelessness Plan should therefore:

- embed a **human rights-based approach to housing policy**;
- improve **coordination of roles, funding and accountability across all levels of government**;
- increase the scale and ambition of the **Housing Australia Future Fund**, including higher social housing targets; and
- establish a clear, ongoing investment framework beyond current HAFF rounds.

Strategic, long-term investment in social and affordable housing delivers enduring economic and social benefits - reducing homelessness, improving health and workforce participation, and lowering long-term public expenditure. Treating housing as a human right provides the policy discipline needed to move from short-term fixes to lasting solutions.

I call on the Commonwealth to progress a National Housing and Homelessness Plan that treats housing as a human right, strengthens coordination across all levels of government, increases the scale of the Housing Australia Future Fund, and commits to a clear post-HAFF investment pathway to drive sustained growth in social and affordable housing and reduce homelessness nationwide while also ensuring that frontline homelessness service providers are adequately funded and on longer funding cycles.

Reform Property Tax Concessions to Support Housing Affordability and Fairness

Australia's housing system is distorted by generous property tax concessions that overwhelmingly benefit investors while doing little to improve housing affordability or supply. Negative gearing and the capital gains tax (CGT) discount encourage speculative investment in existing housing, inflate prices, and divert public resources away from social and affordable housing.

As highlighted by **ACOSS**, the Commonwealth now spends **more on property investor tax breaks than on social housing, homelessness services and Commonwealth Rent Assistance combined**. This imbalance entrenches inequality, worsens housing stress for renters and first-home buyers, and represents a poor use of public funds at a time of acute housing need.

Reforming property tax concessions is both economically responsible and socially necessary. Well-designed reform can improve budget sustainability, reduce distortions in the housing market, and help rebalance incentives toward housing that meets genuine community need - without disadvantaging existing investors or causing market disruption.

A pragmatic reform pathway is available. Costings prepared by the **Parliamentary Budget Office** for Senator Lambie and I demonstrate that a package of changes that **grandfathers existing investments, limits negative gearing to one property, and reduces the CGT discount going forward** would raise significant revenue over time while allowing investors to adjust gradually. Under this approach, changes would take effect after a transition period, avoiding sudden shocks and protecting small-scale investors.

Specifically, the PBO has costed a model that:

- allows **negative gearing on only one investment property**, with losses on additional properties quarantined until sale;
- **limits access to the CGT discount**, ensuring it is no longer an unlimited subsidy for multiple property sales; and
- **grandfathers existing arrangements**, providing certainty and fairness for current investors.

Once fully implemented, this reform is estimated to improve the underlying cash balance by **around \$1.3 billion per year on an ongoing basis**, with minimal impact on the budget in the forward estimates due to the phased introduction.

Importantly, these reforms would help shift incentives away from bidding up existing homes and toward more productive investment, including **new housing supply**, while freeing up revenue that could be reinvested in social and affordable housing and homelessness services.

Maintaining the status quo means continuing to prioritise tax concessions for property investors over the needs of renters, people experiencing homelessness, and first-home buyers. Reform is both overdue and achievable.

I call on the Commonwealth to commit to reforming property tax concessions by grandfathering existing investments, limiting negative gearing to one property, reducing the capital gains tax discount going forward, and refocusing incentives toward new housing supply - redirecting savings to address housing affordability, homelessness and fiscal sustainability.

SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The ACT has not received our fair share of federal funding over the past 15 years. Despite some welcome recent modest investments from the Albanese Government, we still fall far behind other jurisdictions in the quantum of support provided and lack critical social and community infrastructure. The ACT, in large part because of the Australian Public Service payroll tax exemption, has a much smaller revenue base and is more reliant on federal contributions.

From a Convention centre to public transport to community sport infrastructure - the nation's capital falls far behind other capital cities when it comes to having the kinds of facilities needed to host large-scale conferences, sporting competitions and even concerts.

Community sporting infrastructure

The ACT has some of the highest sport participation rates in the country and, as a consequence of lacking sufficient facilities to service the demand, many of these sports are oversubscribed with organisers forced to turn players away. Sport and physical recreation is central to the health and vitality of our communities and the individuals who comprise them. It is unjustifiable to be turning willing participants away.

We need co-investment from the ACT and Federal Governments to upgrade and expand the capacity of facilities, from the Southern Cross basketball stadium in Tuggeranong whose roof leaks so badly that games, including for junior players, have to be regularly cancelled for safety reasons to expanding the number of tennis courts at the Pines to cope with demand or undertaking field upgrades to ensure they are usable for longer periods.

We also need to ensure that we're not going backwards and welcome investments like in the new aquatic facilities in Commonwealth Park preserve the breadth and depth of activities supported by the current Civic pool site. This includes full competition diving facilities and a deepwater pool. It's deeply concerning that the ACT Government is saying this will not be the case and instead deferred to some other future, unspecified and unfunded facility. As a jointly funded project with the Commonwealth, the Federal Government should insist on the inclusion of the competition dive facilities and deepwater pool used by multiple sports.

East Rugby Women's change room

In 2025, Easts Rugby Club Canberra expanded its program with the introduction of a Women's 10s team, marking exciting growth of women's rugby and community sport in the ACT. While the club has taken important steps to re-integrate women players, existing infrastructure at Griffith Playing Fields has not kept pace with this progress.

The absence of dedicated women's changerooms, along with inadequate toilet and clubhouse facilities, creates safety and accessibility concerns for players and spectators. These shortcomings limit full participation and act as a barrier to further growth in women's sport.

To ensure women players and supporters are able to participate safely, and to create an environment that encourages greater involvement in rugby, Griffith Playing Fields requires purpose-built women's changerooms and showers with lockable doors, as well as separate women's toilet facilities.

I renew my calls on the Commonwealth to co-invest with the ACT Government in a coordinated rollout of new change rooms with dedicated male and female areas across the ACT; to invest in new lights for sporting fields across the ACT that would

be better utilised in the evenings if appropriate lighting were installed; to invest – alongside the ACT Government and local sporting organisations, clubs and schools – in a dedicated field maintenance crew to take care of the ACT's outdoor sporting fields; to invest in the installation of more artificial grass fields spread across the ACT; and ensure the new aquatic facilities at Commonwealth Park include competition dive facilities and deepwater pool.

Investing in Viking Park - A stadium for Canberra's south

Canberra's growing population and vibrant sporting culture require infrastructure to support both elite and community sport. There is a clear gap in Canberra for a smaller, flexible venue that can host mid-sized events and support our teams during construction disruptions.

The proposed redevelopment of Viking Park in Tuggeranong into a boutique 10,000 - 15,000 seat stadium would address this gap. Backed by the local community and a detailed development proposal, the project would provide a high-quality venue for Canberra teams, significantly enhance community sport participation in the south, and stimulate economic activity in the Erindale town centre.

I renew my calls on the Commonwealth to commit ~\$35 million over three years to help deliver this important, shovel-ready infrastructure for Canberra's south. It would deliver immediate benefits for local employment, improve access to sporting facilities in a historically under-served part of the ACT, and strengthen Canberra's capacity to host events of regional and national significance.

Convention Centre Funding

Canberra's National Convention Centre is the second oldest convention centre in the country, and has received the least investment of any comparable site. Successive government reviews have identified that, since at least 2001, a new centre is required to enable the national capital to host major events and conferences. The current facility constrains the national capital's ability to support national and international events, limiting visitor growth and capping economic investment in the region.

Recent commitments from the federal Government, comprising \$100 million in co-investment with the ACT Government for a feasibility study, are a welcome first step. As the national capital, Canberra should receive the same kind of transformative, city-shaping investment delivered to other capital cities through previous national programs such as the City Deal program, from which the ACT received none of the \$10 billion allocated. We need a more comprehensive vision for what our city could look like, including co-locating a multi-use stadium with a new convention centre to maximise the flow-on economic benefits.

I call on the Government to continue co-investment in a national convention centre in the capital alongside the ACT Government. This once-in-a-generation opportunity to deliver long-term, city-building infrastructure would support economic growth and establish Canberra as a world-class destination for events, conferences and live

concerts, whilst establishing the centre close to local restaurants and other entertainment venues provides an opportunity for visitor growth throughout the region.

Norfolk Island Knowledge and Learning Centre

A coalition of community members and the Norfolk Island Council of Elders have been advocating for the establishment of a Norfolk Island Knowledge and Learning Centre on Norfolk Island, within a building that has been privately purchased for the use of the community to research and retain Norfolk Island culture, oral histories and artefacts and to support the education of Norfolk Islanders for the future benefit of the island. The first step in the development of this centre is being proposed by Regional Development Australia (RDA) and the Country Universities Centre for a 'Country University Centre' on Norfolk Island. This is a supported location for students to study together and be supported to succeed. A Country University Centre on Norfolk Island would allow Norfolk Islanders to access not only the physical resources and learning environment they need to succeed in academic study, but also support from learning skills advisors and a network of their peers. A centre such as this will provide students with a community of like minded learners, who are all navigating their higher education learning together. In a small remote community like Norfolk Island, this community support is invaluable and is likely to support higher education completion rates and a better university study experience.

Norfolk Islanders have a strong connection to their island, and for young Islanders seeking to pursue a career, leaving to attend university can be an overwhelming experience. The development of a Country University Centre on Norfolk will provide opportunities for Norfolk Islanders to further their education while remaining on the island and contributing to its future. Due to the Federal government's responsibilities for both national and state level services on Norfolk Island, investment in community infrastructure is critical.

I renew my previous calls on the Commonwealth to fund a Country Universities Centre on Norfolk Island through the Department of Education, and to work with the Norfolk Island Council of Elders to support with costing and developing a plan for safeguarding and showcasing Norfolk Island's unique cultural heritage and knowledge.

Canberra-to-Sydney Rail Upgrades

Greater Newcastle and the Canberra region have comparable population sizes, yet the level of intercity rail service provided to each is markedly different. The Canberra to Sydney rail route currently receives just 21, three-carriage passenger train services in each direction per week, while the Newcastle to Sydney route benefits from a similar number of services every day, with most services also having greater capacity.

This disparity limits the attractiveness, accessibility and reliability of rail travel for people in the Canberra region and constrains opportunities for economic, social and environmental benefits associated with improved intercity rail.

An almost 4.5-hour train ride from Sydney to Canberra is not conducive to what people in the ACT want for our national capital. The potential of high(er)-speed rail, initially from Canberra to Goulburn and Yass, and finally to Sydney and Melbourne, would make rail travel an attractive, low-carbon alternative to driving or flying between these destinations. Further, it would support more affordable housing within a short transit, fostering a more balanced pattern of population and economic growth across the Canberra Region.

Fastrack Australia's 2023 plan lays out a staged approach to upgrading the existing line, rather than replacing it with a new one. Their proposal offers gradual improvements at each stage, first focusing on Canberra out to Goulburn and Yass – a standalone project with low engineering risk. Each stage would decrease transit times and thereby increase the attractiveness of rail travel. Tracks would be upgraded to be high-speed ready, enabling the eventual transformation of the route into genuine high-speed rail.

Building on the Canberra-Goulburn-Yass spur, Fastrack proposes staged upgrades to the Canberra-to-Sydney line that would offer a 90-minute Canberra-to-Sydney trip after the fifth stage of works is complete. Reduced travel times across the Canberra Region will accelerate the growth of regional centres surrounding the ACT, like Yass and Goulburn, by increasing their felt proximity to the city, thereby making faster trains a key enabler of regional economic growth.

Further, Canberra-to-Sydney line is also well placed to be a key route establishing an early foundation for the longer-term development of a national highspeed rail network. As part of upgrading the Canberra-to-Sydney rail line, a new location should be explored for the Canberra rail station with consideration given to maximising connectivity with our growing light rail network. At the time I welcomed the Albanese Government's establishment of the High Speed Rail Authority. As part of realising the long-term ambitions of the Authority, I call on the Commonwealth to deliver on much-needed rail improvements connecting our national capital with the surrounding region, Sydney and, ultimately, Melbourne.

Disappointingly for Canberrans, very little progress has been made on any form of meaningful upgrades. Travel time has not materially improved, remaining essentially the same as decades ago. There has been no major realignment, straightening, or electrification of the corridor. No higher-speed rolling stock has been introduced and the line still mixes passenger services with freight, limiting speed and frequency.

The \$2.8 million investment under the Urban Precincts and Partnerships Program to make the Canberra Railway Station precinct housing-ready, while welcome, pales in comparison to the billions being spent to upgrade rail infrastructure in other jurisdictions.

I call on the Commonwealth to commit to jointly funding meaningful upgrades over the forward estimates that will materially reduce rail travel times between Sydney and Canberra.

Multicultural Centre Funding

With more than a quarter of Canberrans born overseas, Canberra's multicultural community is diverse and growing. We are fortunate to have many vibrant and active communities and multicultural organisations that regularly showcase diverse cultures and bring people together through events, celebrations and community service.

These community engagements are integral to the social fabric of our city and nation. They reduce social isolation, encourage social cohesion and foster a sense of belonging.

A wide range of ACT community organisations and individuals regularly approach me with a shared message: there is a strong need for a Canberra Multicultural Centre with the capacity to host several thousand people. For it to genuinely serve our communities, the space would need to be affordable and available at non-commercial rates and be specifically designed to cater to the varying needs of our growing multicultural community - from smaller meeting rooms and education spaces to an industrial kitchen and large events facilities.

For too long, Canberra's multicultural communities have lacked a central, purpose-built space where cultures can be celebrated, languages shared and vital services delivered. As the national capital of a vibrant multicultural country, a purpose-built multicultural centre in Canberra is an essential investment.

I call on the Commonwealth to co-invest with the ACT Government to develop a new, accessible and purpose-built Multicultural Centre that meets community expectations.

HEALTH AND AGED CARE

Invest in a Gynaecological Cancer Transformation Initiative

Every day, 19 women in Australia are diagnosed with gynaecological cancer. More than 55 per cent of these women will be diagnosed with a cancer that is untreatable. Yet, gynaecological cancers remain among the most underfunded and under-researched cancer types. Together, ovarian, uterine, cervical, vulvar and vaginal cancers account for a significant share of cancer-related deaths among women, with survival rates lagging well behind those for better-funded cancers. Despite advances in other areas of oncology, decades of underinvestment in research have left outcomes for many gynaecological cancers largely unchanged.

Ovarian Cancer is the most deadly gynaecological cancer, with around 1,900 Australian women diagnosed each year and three women losing their lives to ovarian cancer every day. Due to late stage diagnosis, the five-year survival rate is only 49 per cent - the same prognosis as in 1975.

Women frequently experience delayed diagnosis, limited treatment options and fragmented care pathways. Symptoms are often non-specific, screening options are limited or non-existent for several cancer types, and access to specialist multidisciplinary care varies

widely depending on geography and socioeconomic status. These gaps result in preventable deaths, poorer quality of life, and higher long-term costs to the health system.

The harrowing consequences of these gaps in diagnosis and limited options for curative treatment for women, their families and their communities were shared with me with devastating emotion by the mother-in-law of one young ACT woman, Heidi D'Elboux Barnier, who died in July 2025 - just three months after her Stage IV Ovarian Cancer diagnosis - leaving behind her partner of 13 years and nearly three-year-old son.

The **Gynaecological Cancer Transformation Initiative** sets out a clear, evidence-based pathway to change this trajectory. It proposes a coordinated national investment in **research, early detection, clinical trials, data infrastructure and workforce capability**, with a strong focus on equity and translation - ensuring discoveries lead to real-world improvements in survival and quality of life.

A one-off, strategic investment would enable Australia to accelerate progress across the full cancer pathway: improving screening and diagnostics, expanding access to clinical trials, supporting precision medicine approaches, and embedding best-practice models of care nationwide. Importantly, this initiative would also address disparities faced by First Nations women, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and women living in regional and remote areas.

Without decisive Commonwealth action, gynaecological cancers will continue to receive a fraction of the investment afforded to other cancers, and women will continue to face poorer outcomes simply because of the type of cancer they develop.

I call on the Commonwealth to commit \$70 million to the Gynaecological Cancer Transformation Initiative, to deliver a nationally coordinated program of research, testing and treatment that improves survival, reduces inequity, and transforms outcomes for women with gynaecological cancers across Australia.

Increase Funding for Support at Home to Deliver Timely, Fully Funded Aged Care at Home

Access to timely, high-quality aged care at home is essential to enabling older Australians to live independently, with dignity, and to reducing pressure on hospitals and residential aged care. Yet current funding levels are failing to meet demand, resulting in unacceptably long wait times and inadequate care.

New data from the **Productivity Commission** shows that the **median wait time for older Australians to access home care has blown out to 245 days**, more than doubling from **118 days in 2023–24**. Even after an assessment is completed, older people are waiting months before care actually begins.

These delays have real and damaging consequences. Older Australians are left without the support they need to manage daily living, increasing the risk of falls, hospitalisation and premature entry into residential care. Prolonged wait times also contribute directly to

hospital bed block, driving up health system costs and placing additional pressure on state hospital systems.

We know there's still around 200,000 people in the queue waiting for help and I've heard stories of people waiting 12 months just for handrails to get installed in their bathroom, let alone access to more intensive supports.

At the same time, there are growing concerns that some **Support at Home packages are not fully funded**, with reports indicating that certain packages are being funded at **as little as 60 per cent of the level required** to deliver appropriate care. Underfunded packages force providers to ration services, shift costs onto older people and their families, or decline referrals altogether - undermining the intent of recent aged care reforms.

While the Commonwealth has committed to releasing additional packages, including tens of thousands of new places, supply has not kept pace with demand, nor with the true cost of delivering care. Without sufficient funding, the transition to Support at Home risks replicating the same structural shortages and delays that plagued the Home Care Packages program.

Investing in timely, fully funded home care is both a social and economic imperative. Effective Support at Home services reduce avoidable hospital admissions, delay entry into residential care, support carers, and improve quality of life for older Australians - delivering long-term savings across the health and aged care systems.

I call on the Commonwealth to increase funding for Support at Home to deliver more packages faster, ensure all packages are fully funded at the level required to meet care needs, and reduce excessive wait times so older Australians can access the support they need when they need it.

Extend Paid Parental Leave for Families with Premature and Sick Babies

Each year in Australia, more than **48,000 babies require care in a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) or Special Care Nursery (SCN)**. For these families, the arrival of a baby is not only unexpected but often traumatic, involving weeks or months in hospital at a time of acute emotional and financial vulnerability.

Current Commonwealth Paid Parental Leave (PPL) settings do not reflect this reality. Parents of premature or sick babies are frequently forced to stop work much earlier than planned, yet must use their paid parental leave entitlement while their baby remains hospitalised. This means that the leave that is intended to support bonding and recovery at home is instead consumed during prolonged hospital stays, leaving parents with little or no paid leave once their baby is discharged and forcing them to return to work just as they are adjusting to the demands of new parenthood, often with babies with ongoing health complications and increased medical needs.

Research conducted by the **Miracle Babies Foundation** shows that **eight in ten families with a premature baby experience additional financial strain**. Loss of income during extended hospitalisation, combined with travel, accommodation and medical costs, places

families under severe pressure. Many parents - particularly women - are then forced to return to work earlier than planned, undermining recovery, attachment and long-term workforce participation.

The impacts extend beyond finances. Parents of babies in NICU or SCN face increased risks of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress, compounded by separation from their baby and ongoing health concerns. Supporting parents to remain with their baby during hospitalisation is critical to bonding, child development and family wellbeing, and reduces longer-term costs to the health and social service systems.

The **Miracle Babies Foundation**, in partnership with the Neonatal Critical Care Alliance, has proposed a targeted and compassionate reform to the Paid Parental Leave scheme. This would provide **additional Parental Leave Pay for families whose babies are hospitalised for two weeks or more**, recognising that these families face circumstances fundamentally different from those experienced in standard births.

Specifically, the proposal would provide:

- **one additional week of Paid Parental Leave for the primary carer for each week a baby remains in hospital beyond two weeks, capped at 14 additional weeks;** and
- **an additional two weeks of paid leave for partners**, recognising the critical support role they play during prolonged hospitalisation.

This reform would reduce forced separation, support parental mental health, and help ensure women are not permanently lost from the workforce due to circumstances entirely outside their control.

I call on the Commonwealth to amend the Paid Parental Leave scheme to provide additional paid leave entitlements for families with premature and sick babies, in line with the Miracle Babies Foundation proposal, ensuring parents can be with their baby during extended hospitalisation and return to the workforce when they are ready.

ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT

Extend Solar Sharer to ACT Residents

The ACT was the first jurisdiction to reach 100 per cent renewable electricity, and households have embraced rooftop solar and electrification at scale. Yet despite this leadership, ACT residents have been excluded from the Commonwealth's new Solar Sharer scheme, which provides three hours of free electricity each day to households in New South Wales, South Australia and Queensland.

This exclusion is a missed opportunity. Solar Sharer is designed to cut power bills, ease cost-of-living pressures and make better use of abundant, low-cost solar generation during the middle of the day. These benefits are just as relevant, if not more so, in the ACT.

However, because the ACT operates under a different electricity pricing framework, local households are currently unable to access the scheme.

Addressing this gap will require coordinated action from the Commonwealth and the ACT Government to identify a workable pathway for implementation. Canberrans should not be asked to pay more or wait longer to access clean energy benefits that are already being delivered elsewhere. A scheme called “Solar Sharer” should be national in practice as well as in name.

I call on the Commonwealth to provide the necessary funding and work with the ACT Government and the Australian Energy Regulator to extend the Solar Sharer scheme to ACT residents, ensuring households in the nation’s capital can access the same bill relief and clean energy benefits as those in other participating states.

Electrification and renters

In Australia, over 30% of freestanding homes have rooftop solar, but only about 3% of apartments do. In the Australian Capital Territory, about 19.4 percent of occupied homes were apartments in 2021. Given the average household size, that means roughly 87,500 people lived in apartments in the ACT.

Currently, the Federal Government supports households to access solar energy through the Small-scale Renewable Energy Scheme (SRES) and the Cheaper Home Batteries Program. Both programs overwhelmingly benefit home owners in freestanding homes.

At the same time the Energy Bill Relief Fund, which gave all households \$450 off their electricity bills has now ended.

People who rent also deserve support with their power bills and the opportunity to access at least some of the benefits and cost savings solar energy offers.

Better Renting reports that 70% of renters avoid heating or cooling due to energy costs, leading to health impacts.

To address these challenges, I call on the Commonwealth to introduce a means-tested rebates for apartment owners installing balcony solar. Lower-income owners could receive up to 60% rebates, while higher-income owners receive 20%. Renters access a baseline rebate. Savings could range from \$200 to \$500 annually. Advocacy groups Solar Citizens, the Clean Energy Council, Better Renting, and others support equitable energy access, particularly given climate and cost-of-living pressures. This scheme delivers on those goals.

Funding for Conservation of the Western Edge of Canberra

The Western Edge of Canberra encompasses areas of high ecological value, cultural importance to Ngunnawal people, and growing importance as a buffer between urban

development and fire-prone country. As Canberra continues to grow westward, there is a narrowing window to secure long-term protection for this landscape before development pressures foreclose future options.

The land holds tens of thousands of years of cultural knowledge and connection. Yet the ACT remains the only jurisdiction in Australia without land formally protected for First Nations peoples. Investing in First Nations-led land management on the Western Edge presents a unique opportunity to restore Country, support cultural renewal, and deliver measurable biodiversity, fire management and community benefits. Co-management models led by Traditional Owners are proven to improve ecological outcomes while creating meaningful, place-based employment.

There is strong community and expert support for protecting the Western Edge, including from conservation organisations, scientists and local residents. However, achieving lasting protection will require upfront investment to undertake detailed planning and governance design, alongside early restoration and land management activities.

Strategic early investment by the Commonwealth would unlock longer-term outcomes, reduce future costs associated with unmanaged growth and fire risk, and help ensure Canberra's expansion does not come at the expense of irreplaceable cultural and environmental values.

I call on the Commonwealth to provide an initial investment to support First Nations-led land management, ecological restoration, and planning and feasibility work for the Western Edge of Canberra, as a first step toward permanent protection and long-term co-management of this nationally significant landscape.

Active Travel Infrastructure

Canberra has been ranked the least walkable city in Australia. We are not investing sufficiently to make walking and cycling safe, efficient and attractive options across our city. Better active travel infrastructure, including dedicated cycle lanes and wider, well-maintained footpaths, is essential to reduce car dependence and support the health and wellbeing of Canberrans of all ages.

Active travel infrastructure requires forward planning, secure funding and rapid implementation, alongside or ahead of transport investments. The ACT Government's Active Travel Plan provides a strong framework, but without serious funding commitments it cannot be delivered at the pace our growing city requires. Investment must be sufficient to support both upgrades and ongoing maintenance across established and developing suburbs. Pedal Power's four-point plan offers a practical guide for prioritising high-impact investments.

Upgrades along Adelaide Avenue should be treated as an urgent priority. This is one of Canberra's busiest corridors and currently relies on on-road cycle lanes, creating unsafe conditions. A feasibility study has already been completed, and Commonwealth co-investment could significantly accelerate delivery, well ahead of the Light Rail Stage 2 timeline.

I call on the Commonwealth to double the National Active Transport Fund from \$100 million to \$200 million, and to co-invest with the ACT Government in delivering the Active Travel Plan, beginning with a new Civic-to-Woden active travel corridor.

Invasive Species Solutions Research Fund

Australia is a megadiverse country. We also have one of the worst extinction rates in the modern world, with an ever-growing list of threatened species and ecosystems. Status assessments consistently indicate ecosystems and ecological integrity at collapse or near-collapse.

Habitat loss and degradation, changes to fire regime and water flows, the introduction of invasive species, and climate change all threaten our biodiversity. A recent international report concluded that invasives are implicated in about 60% of species extinctions globally, and are estimated to cost >\$423 billion each year. Australian biota is particularly susceptible to impacts of novel, introduced species because of our long history as an isolated continent.

Australia is a world leader in some approaches to protect threatened species from invasive species, such as eradicating invasive vertebrate species from islands; building large fenced areas to exclude cats, foxes, rabbits and other invasive vertebrate species; and developing target-specific toxins and toxin delivery systems. Successful examples include the *Cactoblastis* moth to control prickly pear and the eradication of cats, rats and rabbits from Dirk Hartog Island.

These were long-term efforts that required sustained funding. In general there has been limited coordination, support and investment in research for controlling invasives for environmental outcomes, with more support for invasive species that impact agriculture.

Overall, current research and management for the control of invasive species is failing: there are no known solutions for some invasive species; most invasive species continue to spread; new invasives continue to be introduced – all at increasing costs to biodiversity. A more strategic and long-term approach is needed to find solutions for the effective control of invasive species and avoid ongoing and accelerating losses of Australian biodiversity.

An ongoing funding model would tackle this leading cause of biodiversity decline in Australia head-on. Invasive species research and development could be prioritised and delivered in a much more strategic way. Research could range from short intensive field trials in single jurisdictions to contain the spread of newly arrived invasives, through to long-term research like synthetic biology options based on gene drives or AI-assisted networks of trap-based devices that recognise feral species before delivering target-specific toxins.

A funding model that can direct support to the best collaborative groups of scientists and managers for each specific problem would maximise the chances of success and impact. Funds could be used to lever co-investment from governments, research and management institutions. Some investment could be directed to drive capacity and skills acquisition in regional and rural Australia, and to support Indigenous participation and leadership roles.

The fund could utilise an independent panel of experts (wildlife ecologists, conservation managers, First Nations representatives, epidemiologists) to consult externally and develop a long-term plan and strategy that sets strategic objectives and priorities.

72% of survey respondents described increasing investment in order to halt species extinction and preserve biodiversity as either important or very important. Effective management of invasive species is only possible with sustained investment in the development and implementation of technological solutions. The best way to achieve this is through a fund that delivers consistent, predictable funding into invasive species research over a long period of time.

64% of people surveyed described funding for conservation and invasive species management in Canberra as important or very important to them, with only 7% reporting it was not important to them.

I call on the Commonwealth to establish an off-budget \$2 billion Invasive Species Solutions Research Fund to fund the investment and development of technological solutions to invasive species management.

Long-term, Sustainable Funding for the CSIRO

The CSIRO is Australia's national science agency and a cornerstone of our research, innovation and sovereign capability. More than 1,000 Canberrans work at the CSIRO, contributing to world-leading research across climate science, environmental monitoring, health, agriculture and emerging technologies. Yet despite the scale and importance of this work, the CSIRO has been subjected to years of funding instability, leading to repeated rounds of job losses and growing uncertainty for staff and research partners.

Investment in the CSIRO has fallen to historic lows. On a per-capita basis, funding is less than half what it was in the 1980s, and as a share of GDP it has declined by more than 80 per cent. This erosion of funding has left the agency vulnerable, with core research capability increasingly crowded out by short-term funding cycles and neglected capital budgets. Once research capability is lost, it is costly and often impossible to rebuild.

The Government's decision as part of the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) to provide an additional \$232 million in funding for the CSIRO in the 2026 calendar year is a welcome first step. However, as a one-off measure, it does not resolve the underlying structural problem. Without permanent, indexed funding, uncertainty will persist and future cuts will remain a real risk.

I call on the Commonwealth to make the additional \$232 million in funding for the CSIRO in the 2026 calendar year a permanent, annual addition to the CSIRO's appropriation, and to index the full appropriation (including capital funding) to inflation to provide long-term stability and certainty for Australia's national science agency.

Reinstate the Threatened Species Recovery Hub

I support a proposal from Professor David Lindenmayer to establish a world-class Extinction Prevention and Species Recovery Initiative. The proposed Initiative, modelled on the discontinued Threatened Species Recovery Hub in operation from 2014 to 2021, would match leading science with policy-making to halt extinctions and species decline.

The Initiative requires an investment of \$46 million, which would be supplemented with at least \$46 million in cash and in-kind support from industry partners, universities, research groups and affiliates.

Australia is a world leader in biodiversity loss. We have the highest rate of mammal extinctions in the world. Worse, extinction rates show no signs of slowing. Species continue to be added to Australia's already-lengthy threatened species list.

Ongoing biodiversity loss is not only bad for the environment; it has a significant impact on agricultural productivity, trade competitiveness and human health.

I welcome the announcement from the Albanese Government of a goal of no new extinctions. This is an ambitious and important policy aspiration.

To achieve this goal, we need better coordination between science and policy making to ensure that advances in research are translated into better policy outcomes as quickly as possible.

We are running out of time to achieve effective biodiversity conservation and successful environmental management.

The \$46 million allocation is an investment in biodiversity conservation, protecting iconic species, and showcasing global leadership in sustainable environmental management.

I call on the Commonwealth to invest \$46 million in a new Extinction Prevention and Species Recovery Initiative. This would fund the Initiative for at least six years.

National Centre for Long-Term Ecological Monitoring

I support a proposal from Professor David Lindenmayer, Professor Andrew MacIntosh and Craig Connelly to establish a National Centre for Long-Term Ecological Monitoring that will provide scientifically rigorous, credible, and independent ecological monitoring capability to monitor ecological restoration and biodiversity recovery.

The National Centre for Long-Term Ecological Monitoring will be supported by the Australian National University and leverage 41 years of long-term data on tall, wet forests in the Victorian Central Highlands to help propel the development of Australia's Nature Repair Market.

The Nature Repair Market will require suitably robust and carefully considered governance models for annual expenditure on ecological monitoring, reporting, and community engagement.

The centre will develop a green bond concept, which focuses on a 355,000-hectare area, including the proposed new Great Forest National Park, aiming to fund restoration efforts, habitat recovery, invasive species control, and tourism infrastructure.

The National Centre for Long-Term Ecological Monitoring will provide independent data streams, ensuring integrity, transparency and accountability. It will deliver six-monthly reports to all stakeholders, including major Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations (ENGOs) and senior financial investor groups.

This proposal – when combined with a Commonwealth Government commitment to fund the development of a market mechanism supporting the Great Forest National Park Green Bond to deliver fungible biodiversity conservation certificates – will stimulate the Treasury Corporation of Victoria, to consider issuing a \$150 - \$200 million green bond, attracting private investment capital funded by a combined cash yield and accredited biodiversity certificates.

Proposed financing includes \$24 million dollars each from the Federal Government and \$12 million from philanthropic sources, totalling \$36 million.

I call on the Commonwealth to invest \$10 million in a National Centre for Long-Term Ecological Monitoring, supported by the Australian National University.

Fuel Tax Credits

The fuel tax credit scheme is one of the largest and fastest-growing expenditures in the federal budget, costing over \$10 billion each year and projected to grow by 20% over the coming four years.. Nearly half of this funding is directed towards the resources sector, with the Parliamentary Budget Office finding that individual coal companies claim on average \$20 million a year.

The OECD and the WTO both classify this scheme as a fossil fuel subsidy. By reducing the effective cost of diesel for heavy industries, the scheme disincentives decarbonisation efforts and investment in low-emissions alternative fuels. It undermines emissions reduction efforts and weakens effectiveness of policies such as the Safeguard Mechanism that rely on price signals to drive emissions reduction.

Reforming the scheme would accelerate the decarbonisation of resources and heavy industries and provide a much-needed increase to the budget bottom line, at a time when Australia is facing structural, long-term budgetary deficits.

I call on the Government to end handouts to polluting industries like coal mining, whilst leaving the credit for farmers in place. Ending fuel tax credits for fossil fuel companies could save \$9 billion over the next four years and \$30 billion over the next

decade, whilst aligning budget priorities with emissions reduction efforts and long-term fiscal repair.

Lift National R&D Investment and Strengthen Australia's Science System

Australia's long-term prosperity, security and resilience depend on sustained investment in research and development (R&D). Yet Australia continues to underinvest in R&D compared to comparable advanced economies. Australia's total R&D investment sits at **around 1.7–1.8 per cent of GDP**, well below the **OECD average of approximately 2.7 per cent**, and far behind leading innovation nations such as **Germany, the United States, Japan and South Korea**, which invest **3 per cent of GDP or more**.

This persistent gap risks undermining Australia's productivity, innovation capacity and ability to respond to major national challenges, including climate change, health security, energy transition, advanced manufacturing and defence. Without decisive action, Australia will continue to fall further behind global peers, weakening sovereign capability and future economic growth.

The Commonwealth's **Strategic Examination of Research and Development** provides an important opportunity to reset Australia's approach to R&D. However, reform alone will not close the gap. A credible national response must include a clear commitment to lift R&D investment as a proportion of GDP over time, providing certainty to researchers, industry and international partners.

The Australian Academy of Science has identified urgent areas where targeted investment is needed now to secure Australia's science system and maximise returns on existing government programs. These include **next-generation high-performance computing and data infrastructure**, coordinated **earth system science** to underpin climate intelligence, sustained investment in **STEM education**, and participation in **international research collaborations**. These capabilities are foundational to evidence-based decision-making, productivity growth and regional leadership.

In particular, Australia lacks a long-term national strategy for high-performance computing and data, despite its central role in weather forecasting, disaster preparedness, artificial intelligence, drug discovery, energy system optimisation and national security. The Academy also highlights the need for a nationally coordinated approach to earth system science, proposing the establishment of an **Australian Institute for Earth System Science** to address fragmentation, close critical knowledge gaps and deliver reliable climate intelligence for decades to come.

Countries that treat R&D as core economic infrastructure consistently outperform those that do not. Stable, long-term investment enables stronger industry collaboration, better research translation and higher productivity growth. Without a clear trajectory to lift R&D investment toward OECD norms, Australia risks locking in lower growth, weaker innovation outcomes and higher long-term costs.

I call on the Commonwealth to commit to increasing national R&D investment as a proportion of GDP toward the OECD average, to implement the recommendations of the Strategic Examination of Research and Development once released, and to invest in the priority capabilities identified by the Australian Academy of Science - including high-performance computing, coordinated earth system science, STEM education and international research collaboration - to secure Australia's long-term productivity, resilience and global competitiveness.

Reforming the Petroleum Rent Resource Tax

Australia is one of the world's largest exporters of liquified natural gas, exporting \$70 billion worth in 2023 alone. However we received no Petroleum Resource Rent Tax (PRRT) revenue from offshore LNG exports that year. Despite changes to the PRRT supported by Labor and the Greens, budget papers show that projected PRRT revenue is expected to fall over the forward estimates, highlighting the need for far more ambitious reform.

More than half of our gas continues to be exported without any royalties paid, representing billions of dollars in publicly owned resources transferred to multinational gas companies with minimal return. Conversely, countries like Norway have used resource taxation to invest in a sovereign wealth fund worth nearly \$3 trillion, funding education, healthcare and public infrastructure that delivers public benefits for generations. Our current approach represents a huge missed opportunity to fund critical priorities, including health, education, housing and environmental protection, in a time of ongoing structural deficits.

I call on the Commonwealth to substantially increase the PRRT so that Australians receive a fair share from the sale of our national resources. This should include strengthening tax settings, improving transparency, and ensuring that projected revenue reflects the true scale and value of LNG exports.

A SAFETY NET THAT KEEPS PEOPLE SAFE

Invest in Community Legal Centres to Deliver Access to Justice

Community Legal Centres (CLCs) are a critical part of Australia's justice and social service infrastructure. They provide free legal assistance to people facing some of the most acute cost-of-living pressures - housing insecurity, family violence, debt, employment exploitation and access to social security. Demand for CLC services continues to rise sharply, yet funding has not kept pace, forcing centres to turn people away at record levels.

In the 2025-26 budget the Federal Government allocated \$3.1 billion from 2025-26 to 2028-29 for the National Access to Justice Partnership (NAJP). While welcome, CLC has said this falls far short of what is required to address the community legal sector funding crisis.

Across Australia, CLCs - including here in the ACT - are reporting overwhelming unmet need. Each year, hundreds of thousands of people seek legal help but are unable to receive it due to funding constraints. This includes victim-survivors of family and domestic violence, renters facing eviction, people navigating complex Centrelink systems, and workers experiencing wage theft. Without early legal assistance, these issues escalate, driving higher costs for courts, health systems, housing services and governments.

CLCs play a vital preventative role. Early legal advice resolves problems before they become crises, keeping people housed, safe and financially stable. This not only improves individual outcomes, but delivers significant downstream savings by reducing demand on courts, emergency services and social support systems. Underfunding CLCs is a false economy.

CLCs Australia's 2026–27 pre-budget submission outlines a clear, costed pathway to stabilise and strengthen the sector. It calls for **\$303.5 million in Commonwealth funding over four years**, including:

- **\$225 million to restore and increase core Commonwealth funding**, and
- **\$78.5 million to address indexation shortfalls**, ensuring funding keeps pace with rising costs.

This investment would allow CLCs to meet growing demand, retain skilled staff, expand services in high-need areas, and deliver equitable access to justice across metropolitan, regional and remote communities.

Without this investment, the justice gap will continue to widen, leaving the most vulnerable Australians without help and shifting greater costs onto other parts of government.

I call on the Commonwealth to commit \$303.5 million over four years to Community Legal Centres, as outlined in the CLCs Australia 2026–27 pre-budget submission, to restore sustainable funding, address unmet legal need, and ensure access to justice for people facing cost-of-living pressures across Australia.

Lift Income Support to Reduce Poverty and Improve Economic Inclusion

Australia's system of income support is failing to provide a basic standard of living for people who rely on it. Payments such as JobSeeker and Youth Allowance remain well below the poverty line, leaving people unable to meet essential costs and increasing pressure on health, housing and community services.

The Federal Government's own **Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee (EIAC)** - established following an agreement I made with the Government to provide independent advice on poverty and inequality - has repeatedly identified **lifting JobSeeker and related payments as its top priority recommendation**. For the third year running, the Committee found current payment rates are inadequate and are causing serious harm and I expect they will again in the lead up to this year's federal budget.

The Committee recommends lifting JobSeeker to **at least 90 per cent of the pension**, increasing the daily rate from around **\$56 to \$74 per day**. New research cited by the Committee shows that this reform would not only reduce poverty, but also deliver broader social and economic benefits. Analysis by Mandala demonstrates that **for every dollar invested in lifting JobSeeker to 90 per cent of the pension, an additional 24 cents would be returned to society through improved health and wellbeing outcomes**, alongside gains in productivity and reduced pressure on public services.

Inadequate income support also has serious gendered impacts. The Committee highlights evidence that low payment rates can trap women in violent and abusive relationships by limiting their financial independence and ability to leave safely. Raising payments would directly support victim-survivors of family and domestic violence and strengthen economic security for women.

The EIAC also calls for urgent reform of the employment services system, including ending automated payment suspensions and rebuilding the system on principles of **natural justice, human rights and dignity**.

The evidence is clear and consistent. Inadequate income support entrenches poverty, damages health, reduces workforce participation and increases long-term costs to government. The EIAC's forthcoming report ahead of the next Budget provides a further opportunity for the Commonwealth to act on this advice.

I call on the Commonwealth to substantially lift JobSeeker, Youth Allowance and related income support payments in line with the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee's recommendations, including raising JobSeeker to at least 90 per cent of the pension, increasing the Remote Area Allowance, and committing to ongoing reform to ensure income support provides a genuine pathway out of poverty and toward economic inclusion.

Increase Funding for Frontline Family and Domestic Violence Services

The Albanese Labor Government has made important commitments to addressing family and domestic violence, including increased investment in crisis responses, perpetrator interventions and national reform efforts. These investments are welcome and have helped stabilise parts of the system. However, frontline services continue to face demand that far outstrips resourcing, placing victim-survivors and workers at risk.

The experience of the Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS) in the ACT illustrates the gap between policy intent and service reality. DVCS is the ACT's specialist 24/7 family and domestic violence crisis service, supporting more than 700 Canberrans each month and responding to 1,900 calls in November alone. Demand continues to rise, and client needs are becoming more complex.

Despite this, **DVCS has been notified of a net reduction in its core funding from 2026–27, leaving the service approximately \$820,000 worse off than in 2025–26. This reduction comes at a time when DVCS is already only able to answer around 50 per**

cent of calls to its crisis line. Further funding cuts would inevitably reduce service availability, increase missed calls, and heighten the risk of serious harm or death in the community.

Funding reductions would also force cuts to specialist services for children, long-term case management for people experiencing high-risk and complex violence, and workforce supports that are essential to retaining skilled practitioners. Like services across Australia, DVCS is grappling with workforce shortages, burnout and rising costs. Underfunding frontline DFV services is a false economy, shifting costs to hospitals, police, courts, homelessness services and child protection systems.

While responsibility for service delivery is shared across jurisdictions, the Commonwealth plays a critical role in setting funding baselines and ensuring frontline services are adequately resourced to meet national expectations on safety and prevention. Without sustained Commonwealth investment, gains made through recent reforms risk being undermined at the point where victim-survivors first seek help.

I call on the Commonwealth to build on its existing investments by increasing funding for frontline family and domestic violence services, ensuring services like DVCS are not forced to reduce capacity, and that victim-survivors across Australia can access timely, life-saving support when they need it most.

Expanding and increasing paid placement support to address placement poverty

The final report of the Universities Accord found that placement poverty remains a significant and unresolved barrier for students studying in critical fields, identifying it as an area for urgent reform. Recommendation 14 of Accord Final Report was that governments, education providers and employers work together to introduce financial support for unpaid placements. I've heard from students here in the ACT, home to five universities, that mandatory unpaid placements cause severe hardship, increase drop-out rates and lead to substantial levels of burnout. Students should not have to choose between paying for essentials and pursuing courses essential for the health and wellbeing of our communities.

The Government's introduction of a \$319 weekly supplement for eligible students in nursing, midwifery, social work and teaching is a welcome first step towards reducing the financial burdens that unpaid placements impose. However, it falls well short of the intent of the Accord's recommendations. The payment is below a liveable income and it only extends to a narrow class of students, excluding thousands of students in essential disciplines like psychology, medicine, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and other allied health professions. These students are still required to complete hundreds of hours of unpaid placements, often whilst living in poverty.

These students are training for roles that Australia vitally needs, and they deserve equal investment to their peers in other disciplines. They should not be penalised for choosing careers that will ultimately give back to their communities. For example, the National Mental

Health Strategy identified persistent workforce shortages in psychology, but students in this discipline are required to complete 1000 hours of unpaid placements. Excluding such professions from paid placement support risks undermining critical workforces and deterring students from completing essential qualifications.

I asked the Parliamentary Budget Office to cost a range of options, including extending paid prac at the Austudy rate to Genetics, General Medicine, Radiology, Pharmacy, Dentistry, Optometry, Radiography, Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Chiropractic and Osteopathy, Speech Pathology, Audiology, Podiatry, Rehabilitation Therapies, Nutrition and Dietetics, Counselling and Psychology students. It calculated this would represent a budget investment of \$245.2 million to 2028-29. Such a modest investment would make an enormous difference to students in some of our most sought-after professions and help alleviate workforce shortages that will only exacerbate as our population continues to age.

I call on the Government to expand paid placement support to all allied health and other essential disciplines as a first step, and to increase payments to a genuinely liveable rate. The Government should also shift funding administration from universities to Services Australia, aligning with other income support provision and provide consistency and accessibility to students in need of financial assistance. Addressing placement poverty is a critical step towards filling the ongoing workforce shortages in our healthcare and community services.

Reforming the failed Job Ready Graduates Scheme

Experts, university groups and government reviews have all found that the Job Ready Graduates (JRG) scheme has been a failed policy. The Universities Accord review found that doubling some course fees has not meaningfully shifted course choices and is instead increasing attrition rates, worsening financial stress and saddling students with a lifetime of debt.

Disciplines most affected - arts, humanities, social sciences - are critical to Australia's democratic and cultural prospects. Rather than improving workforce outcomes, the JRG scheme has exacerbated the financial burden of tertiary studies on students, at a time when employers are increasingly requiring tertiary qualifications for even entry-level positions. Despite promises of reforms, delays in winding back this model have compounded the harm to students, with successive cohorts graduating with substantially higher debts as a direct result of inaction to undo a failed Morrison-era policy position. The JRG scheme has now been in force for longer under the Albanese Labor Government than it was under the former Coalition government, and reform is long since overdue.

I asked the PBO to model the cost to students of delay to JRG reform. It found that the failure to reform the Job Ready Graduates scheme since its inception has increased student debt by \$10.26 billion. In addition, the continued delay in reforming the timing of indexing student debt, where interest is charged on money already repaid, will cost people a further \$704 million over the coming four years. Establishing a body like ATEC without addressing underlying inequities in policy settings risks prolonging harm to students.

I call on the Government to scrap the Job Ready Graduates scheme ahead of establishing ATEC to reduce inequities in the higher education system and the financial burden of tertiary studies.

SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT

Making instant asset write off permanent

Small businesses are facing rising operating costs, ongoing economic uncertainty and increasing pressure on cash flow. As the engine room of the Australian economy, they need long-term, reliable policy settings that support investment, productivity and growth.

The Instant Asset Write-Off has proven to be a practical and effective tool to help small businesses invest in the equipment, technology and tools they need to remain competitive. However, since its introduction in 2015, the scheme has been subject to repeated temporary extensions and last-minute changes. This stop-start approach has created uncertainty, making it harder for businesses to plan and delaying investment decisions at precisely the times when certainty matters most.

Making the Instant Asset Write-Off permanent and increasing the threshold would provide clear and enduring benefits. A higher, stable threshold would cut red tape, encourage investment in productivity-enhancing assets, and support businesses to adopt new technologies. It would also provide meaningful relief for small businesses navigating challenging economic conditions, while strengthening competitiveness across the economy.

Small businesses deserve tax settings that reward investment and support long-term growth. A permanent, higher Instant Asset Write-Off would deliver the certainty and stability needed to back small business confidence and unlock sustained economic benefits.

I call on the Commonwealth to establish a permanent \$30,000 Instant Asset Write-Off for small businesses, providing long-term certainty and encouraging ongoing investment in the productive capacity of Australia's small business sector.

Digitisation tax incentives for small businesses

Investing in digital tools and skills is critical to improving productivity, reducing costs and remaining competitive, yet for many small businesses the upfront cost of digitisation remains a significant barrier.

Targeted tax incentives have proven effective in supporting digital adoption. The *Small Business Technology Investment Boost* provided a 20 per cent bonus tax deduction for eligible spending on digital upgrades and staff training, including accounting software, e-commerce platforms, digital marketing tools and cybersecurity. By lowering the cost of investment, the program helped small businesses modernise their operations and build the skills needed to participate in the digital economy.

Despite its success, the Technology Investment Boost was temporary. The loss of this incentive has left a gap in support at a time when digital capability is increasingly essential to business resilience and growth.

Reinstating digitisation tax incentives would provide a clear signal that small businesses are being supported to innovate, adapt and compete. Well-designed, time-limited incentives can drive uptake of new technologies, strengthen cyber resilience and improve long-term productivity across the economy.

I call on the Commonwealth to reinstate the Technology Investment Boost to provide a bonus tax deduction for eligible digital upgrades and staff training, to support productivity, resilience and growth in the digital economy.

Support for Civic small businesses impacted by light rail

Canberra is currently experiencing the highest rate of business insolvencies out of any state or territory, a situation that the prolonged light rail construction works along London Circuit is only exacerbating. These works are jointly funded by the Commonwealth and ACT Governments and are severely impacting businesses in the surrounding construction zone, particularly in hospitality and the night-time economy.

Whilst the light rail will bring long term benefits to the connectivity of our city and improve access to public transport, small businesses affected by its construction are calling for an interim support package to prevent further closures during this period. Investment in businesses close to previous infrastructure projects across the country have demonstrated that targeted, time-limited assistance can preserve local businesses and ensure that otherwise thriving precincts can recover once construction is complete. Without such support, we risk losing iconic local businesses and employers from our city centre.

The ACT Government support package, targeted at permit fee waivers and increasing signage, is welcome, however a more comprehensive package is needed. I call on the federal Government to work with the ACT Government to introduce rates relief for impacted businesses, rent assistance for businesses experiencing reduced turnover, and temporary tax and compliance relief. In particular, businesses are calling for a targeted amnesty on ATO interest and penalties, alongside flexible payment arrangements.

Resourcing our regulators

Effective regulation - without an overdose of red tape and bureaucracy - is essential to protect consumers, uphold safety and quality standards, and maintain trust in public institutions and markets. Federal regulators play a critical role in preventing harm, enforcing compliance and ensuring that government policy objectives are delivered in practice - not just on paper.

However, too often regulators are asked to oversee expanding, increasingly complex sectors without commensurate increases in funding or staffing. This mismatch undermines

regulatory effectiveness, shifts systems toward reactive enforcement, and increases the risk of serious failures that impose far greater costs on the community.

Recent experience highlights the consequences of under-resourcing. In financial services, the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) has been tasked with expanded responsibilities following the Banking Royal Commission, rapid growth in financial products, and increased consumer harm risks - yet resource constraints continue to limit proactive surveillance and enforcement. In both early childhood education and care and aged care, there have been egregious examples of extremely distressing regulatory failures. Regulators face growing service numbers and heightened community expectations, but lack sufficient capacity to conduct regular, unannounced spot checks and preventative compliance activity.

In both these cases and many others, the result is the same: problems are identified too late, after harm has already occurred. Under-resourced regulators are forced to triage risk rather than prevent it, weakening accountability and eroding public confidence.

Adequately funding regulators is not red tape - it is essential economic and social infrastructure. Well-resourced regulators are better able to:

- undertake proactive monitoring and enforcement,
- respond quickly to emerging risks,
- prevent serious harm before it occurs, and
- deliver better outcomes at lower long-term cost.

As the Commonwealth continues to expand policy ambition across financial markets, care services and other regulated sectors, regulatory capacity must be treated as a core part of reform, not an afterthought.

I call on the Commonwealth to commit to ensuring all federal regulators are adequately resourced to fulfil their statutory functions, including by strengthening the capacity of agencies such as ASIC and early childhood education and care regulators to undertake proactive oversight, enforcement and spot checks that protect the public and uphold confidence in essential systems.

SUPPORTING GREATER INTEGRITY

Lifting the funding for the ANAO

The Australian National Audit Office plays a vital role in upholding public accountability, uncovering wasteful spending and shining a light on mismanagement and misconduct that would otherwise go unseen. Its work has exposed serious failures across government, from grants rorts to misconduct in passport processing and defence procurement, protecting taxpayers and strengthening trust in public institutions.

Despite this critical role, the ANAO is being under-resourced. The most recent Budget cut its funding by \$4 million, forcing a reduction in performance audits and resulting in fewer audits

being delivered than under the previous Coalition government. At a time of significant public expenditure, this weakening of oversight is deeply concerning.

I renew my calls on the Government to restore and increase funding for the ANAO to ensure that it can deliver its full audit program and provide independent scrutiny of government spending. Proper resourcing of the ANAO is a low cost, high impact way to improve transparency, accountability and public trust in government services.