



# KEEPING CANBERRANS HEALTHY

## Keeping Our Community Well and Out of Hospital

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The ACT Greens understand that preventative healthcare is the most effective way to improve health outcomes and reduce healthcare costs.

The ACT Greens believe that an effective health system must be based on primary health care and preventive health care, including health promotion, disease prevention and early intervention.

We are committed to reducing barriers to access to primary and preventive health care wherever possible will encourage people to interact with health services before they become unwell.

That's why the ACT Greens - while acknowledging the need to ensure our hospital facilities are supported to meet the needs of our growing city - have launched a preventative health plan to reduce hospitalisation for Canberrans.

### > A Preventative Health Strategy

Keeping people healthy should always be our priority, not just treating them when they are already sick. The ACT Government has significantly invested in implementing the Healthy Weight Initiative. This is helping our community, from childhood onwards, get active and stay healthy.

However, substantial continued investment is needed in helping our whole community start to improve their diets, increase exercise, reduce co-morbidity issues (such as smoking) and have active lifestyles.

The ACT Greens will:

- » Develop a new comprehensive preventative health strategy
- » Continue to invest in the Healthy Weight Initiative to continue to keep our community health, and reduce the incidence of heart disease, diabetes and other preventable illness;
- » Better co-ordinate and refocus the existing healthy weight initiative to ensure that the ACT is genuinely focused on preventing obesity, cardiac disease and type 2 diabetes in particular.
- » Provide \$1 million in increased funding for targeted and evidence based Health Promotions Grants.

### > Invest in Two New Walk-In Centres

The ACT hospitals' emergency departments are struggling to respond to the needs of many patients who present at Calvary and The Canberra Hospital who could possibly be treated safely, effectively and more efficiently by professional nurses in community based walk in centres.

These essential services are well regarded in the community, reduce waiting times, and offer free, high quality care and one-off advice and treatment for people with minor illness and injury.

But the model can be improved. We will work with medical experts and Nurse Practitioners to explore what further services they can provide safely and appropriately to the community, and explore increased opening hours.

The ACT Greens will:

- » Open two more walk in centres - in Dickson and Weston Creek - to provide a viable alternative for the increasing and anticipated population.
- » Undertake a review of the data on emergency department presentations and referrals from existing walk in centres to identify whether opening hours and types of medical treatments can be expanded to further alleviate pressure and provide more choices for community based care; and
- » Ensure that walk in centres are providing the full range of appropriate services.

## **> An Office for Mental Health**

The ACT Greens believe in a Canberra where wellbeing is prioritised, quality mental health services are easily available and everyone has access to the treatment and support that they need, when they need it. Given that around one third of our population needs mental health care at some stage in their lives, it is paramount that services are able to match demand.

After many years of increased funding to the mental health sector, both community and government, the ACT Greens remain concerned by the ongoing reports of silos and gaps and the constant revolving door of acute services.

There are still gaps in our mental system and long waiting lists for child and adolescent mental health. This approach could also support a better understanding of the possible gaps that may exist for NDIS clients with complex mental health needs.

Right now, people are struggling to access the right services, at the right time, and for the right period. The ACT Greens are committed to developing more accountable, transparent and community focused approach to both chronic and acute mental health care that puts the people who need the service at the centre of care.

The ACT Greens will:

- » Create a new Office for Mental Health in consultation with local representative bodies and service providers such as the Capital Health Network, local community based advocacy services and government officials; and
- » Empower the Office for Mental Health to provide independent reports and advice to the community and government on what is working and what is not working in the delivery of mental health services; and have a role in partnering and monitoring the delivery of programs.

The Office for Mental Health will also have a role in coordinating the range of support services that are available to Canberrans to ensure that nobody falls through the gaps.

We need to ensure a continuum of support for patients through the full range of the existing services, including residential, outpatient and supported accommodation options. This will be based on the best practise examples of the Western Australian and NSW Mental Health Commissions.

## > **Reducing Rates of Suicide**

The Australian Greens have backed calls for the development and introduction of a new approach to suicide prevention in light of the recommendations of the National Mental Health Commission and calls from Suicide Prevention Australia. We have targets for reducing road deaths and other preventable health issues - the ACT Greens believe we should do the same for reducing suicide.

ACT Greens MLA Amanda Bresnan introduced annual reporting of suicides into the Assembly in 2012. The ACT Government has now reported against this for the past two years, greatly reducing the stigma and taboo around talking about suicide which can stand in the way of people seeking the help they need, leading to tragic and preventable loss of life. As a society, we must better equip our services, and indeed the broader community, to respond to suicide.

The ACT Greens will:

- » Set a target to reduce suicide by 50% by 2025.
- » Establish a Suicide Expert Committee, along the lines of the Child Death Review Committee, to properly examine suicides in the ACT and make policy recommendations to ACT Government to help us better respond to and prevent suicide.
- » Advocate for the creation of a national suicide register through representation at the Ministerial Council level, and the development of improved suicide prevention campaigns relevant to the ACT community.
- » Enhance anti-stigma and health promotions strategies to challenge the ongoing misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the lived experience of mental illness- particularly in relation to at risk groups, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, LGBTI and CALD communities.

Setting a target to reduce suicide means acknowledging, and responding to, suicide as a preventable health issue. It calls on all of us in the Assembly, and in the community, to do all we can to prevent suicide.

It also serves as a constant reminder to never become complacent, and to continue to work to reduce the stigma attached to talking about mental health and mental illness. That is why the ACT Greens are committed to implementing Suicide Prevention Australia's call to reduce the suicide rate by 50 per cent by 2025.