



MORE NURSES FOR CANBERRA

The front line and backbone of our health system

Focusing on prevention to take pressure off hospitals

The ACT Greens will invest in preventative healthcare to help Canberrans stay well and out of hospital, then to get better faster when they leave, with more nurses, nurse practitioners, home and community nurses.

There is no doubt that Canberra's health system faces challenges. The ACT Greens have a comprehensive plan to not only ensure that people get the best possible care when they are sick, but to help our community to have the most healthy, happy and fulfilled lives as possible.

We understand that the community needs and deserves a high quality, free and professional health system, that extends beyond the hospitals and encompasses every stage of life. The community needs a health package that continues to take the pressure off our hospitals, focuses on preventative services and improves access for vulnerable groups and people.

> More Nurses, More Practitioners

We all know that the front line and backbone of the health system are our nurses, and that they are under increasing pressure every day. The ACT Greens want to see more nurses of all levels and provide them with the right levels of staffing to ensure they are safe, and patients are getting the best possible care.

But we also want to see more Advanced Practice Nurses and Nurse Practitioners, who are highly trained professionals capable of undertaking greater levels of care and medical interventions, which can reduce the burden on doctors and other specialists. It also provides a greater continuity of care for patients as they journey through the sometimes complex and resource-challenged medical system.

Nurse Practitioners and Advanced Practice Nurses work as key members of the healthcare team and collaborate with other nurses and healthcare professionals including GPs, medical and surgical specialists, physiotherapists, dieticians, occupational therapists, social workers, and many others. They work in a variety of locations, both in hospital and community settings. By creating more of these dedicated positions, we can also support our existing workforce who may want to advance their skills, and further their careers in new and exciting ways.

But we recognise that we will need to support the workforce to undertake further training, and that is why we will also fund new Nurse Educator positions to support ongoing skills development.

The ACT Greens will:

- » Employ more 50 Nurse Educators, Practitioners and Advanced Practice Nurses;
- » Enhance training and professional development pathways;
- » Ensure we are recruiting now for the future needs to avoid skills shortages; and
- » Ensure that both public hospitals are providing consistent recognition and utilisation of these positions.

> **More Home and Community Nurses**

Home and Community Care nurses are vital for many in our community who need regular non-acute care, or who are recuperating after an injury or surgical procedure. They work with people suffering mental health issues who may be socially isolated, with mothers and newborn babies in the vital first days and weeks after leaving hospital, and with people suffering long term chronic pain or disability.

Many Canberrans rely on nurses to come to their homes for minor nursing care. These nurses ensure that vulnerable patients are cared for in the comfort of their homes, while greatly reducing the chances they will need to re-enter the hospital system.

The ACT Greens will:

- » Review the current ACT Health outpatient and community based services to ensure that vulnerable patients are getting the care they need, and services are adequately resourced and appropriately targeted;
- » Increase funding to these services across the board to reflect outcomes of the review, and provide up to 50 new nurses;
- » Increase the pre and post care available for surgical procedures and post-natal care in particular, to reduce the likelihood of readmission, support enhanced wound care, and increase preventative healthcare measures such as medication reviews, mental health support and nutrition plans; and
- » Increase the level of post-natal home visits.

We also believe that aged care, both residential and in the home, could benefit from a better, more responsive, and integrated approach with continuum of care, in collaboration with doctors. We would seek to partner with the "Home Doctor" service to develop a best practice approach to supporting nurses and carers in a range of environments, and see a stronger preventative system that supports ageing in place where possible.

> **Keeping Our Health Workers Safe**

Nurses and midwives are undertaking increasingly complex work with a growing patient load. As a professional workforce, doing a hard job well under trying conditions, the ACT Greens want to ensure that all nurses are able to undertake their duties safely, and in line with their full scope of practice. Every member of our community has the right to be safe at work

That is why we will hold a series of forums with the Chief Nurse, Australian Nurses and Midwives Federation, Worksafe ACT, the Australian Medical Association, the Australian College of Midwives and other relevant groups to explore areas of common concern regarding: safe staffing levels; appropriate staffing allocations; legislated baseline ratios for high risk areas; and importantly, how to ensure nurses and midwives are able to work to their fully trained capacity.

The ACT Greens will:

- » Host a series of forums to explore and develop recommendations to ensure health workers are safe at work.
- » We commit to working collaboratively with all these stakeholders to take action on any recommendations for Enterprise Agreement or legislative change.

> **Indigenous Health**

Closing the gap when it comes to health is a priority for the ACT Greens. We acknowledge that life outcomes and health indicators for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Canberra region are below that for non-indigenous people, and despite the Closing the Gap targets, these figures reflect the ongoing inequality in our community.

We recognise that these issues require more than just health interventions to really improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples - that is why we support a whole of person, whole of community approach.

The ACT Greens will commit \$13 million to:

- » Support the creation of a social and health services hub in Narrabundah, provide immediate funds to support final design work to begin as soon as possible as proposed by Winnunga Nimityjah Aboriginal Health Service, and commit to providing capital funding once a final feasibility study has been submitted and agreed to by Government.

We also recognise the key concerns raised by the Aboriginal community about the impacts of drug use and mental health, and will provide an additional \$2.5 million dollars in recurrent funding to immediately boost their capacity.

> **\$1.5 Million to Dental Care for Low Income Families**

The ACT Greens believe that it is crucial that essential dental care is provided to Canberrans who need it most. Many Canberrans struggle to afford dental care and are faced with long waiting times. Failing to get the treatment they need can lead to heart disease and stroke. Part of having a good preventative health plan means making sure people can access the dental care they need to prevent more serious illness in the future.

The ACT Greens will:

- » Increase funding to the ACT Health Dental Service which provides a range of dental treatment to ACT pension, concession and health care card holders;
- » Increase the scope of the mobile dental clinics;

- » Work with ACT Health and local private and public dental clinics to support more low income adults, youth and children to access quality proactive and emergency dental care, through increased opening hours and maintaining targeted subsidies; and
- » Raise the inclusion of dental care in the Commonwealth Medicare scheme through the federal Ministerial Council on Health

The ACT Greens have already announced:

> 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 to help 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 healthy, and reduce the incidence of heart disease, diabetes and other preventable illnesses;

opening hours and types of medical treatments can be expanded to further alleviate pressure and

- » 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; and
- » 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 -one in Dickson and one 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
- » Create a new Office for Mental Health in consultation with local representative bodies and

provide more choices for community based care; and

» Ensure that walk in centres are providing the full range of appropriate services.

> Establish a Mental Health Office

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.

> Reducing Rates of Suicide

The Australian Greens have backed calls for the development and introduction of a new approach

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.

The Office for Mental Health will:

» Examine the recent gap analysis undertaken by the ACT Primary Health Network into mental health services, and support increased funding to key areas of need, particularly in the community mental health sector;

» Ensure ongoing whole of sector coordination; Increase carer and consumer representative involvement with the Crisis Assessment and Treatment Team; and

» Increase funding for behaviour management programs and cognitive behavioral programs that focus on emotional regulation.

» Enhance anti-stigma and health promotions strategies to challenge the ongoing

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.

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.