



BACKGROUND PAPER 12: Social inclusion

What was said during Time to Talk Canberra 2030

Social inclusion and equality of individuals and communities was emphasised by Canberrans throughout the Time to Talk Canberra 2030 community engagement. The community's vision for Canberra included better access to services, greater housing choice and affordability and a more equitable public transport system.

To achieve a socially inclusive Canberra society, the community strongly advocated involving community groups from the earliest stages of city planning decision-making. The community also identified a need to further connect and support specific groups such as people with disability, young people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. A vision for Canberra from a community member at Time to Talk Canberra 2030:

'Where the aspects of liveability and the sense of community which we so treasure now are shared by the whole community, independent of individual circumstance ... where all its members have the resources, skills and environments to achieve their potential.'

Definition of issue

In a socially inclusive society, everyone theoretically has the opportunity to participate equally – socially, culturally, economically, physically and politically. It is a society where individuals and/or entire communities have access to opportunities, options and choices in life, and have the resources (skills and assets) and appropriate supports, as well as the personal capacity to make the most of them.¹ Further, social inclusion recognises that every person has strengths and skills, and when these are contributed to a community they add value, enhance resilience and benefit everyone as a key element of healthy and whole communities.

Social exclusion, the converse of social inclusion, occurs when: ... certain individuals are pushed to the edge of society and prevented from participating fully by virtue of their poverty, or lack of basic competencies and opportunities, or as a result of discrimination. This distances them from jobs, income, education and training opportunities, as well as social and community networks and activities².

Research indicates social exclusion is more likely to be experienced by people with disability, minority men and women of race, alternate sexual orientations and gender identities, the elderly and youth compared to other groups of society. The nature and extent of social exclusion experienced is often different for each group.³

Role of strategic land use planning

Social inclusion can be enhanced through deliberate actions to remove or reduce barriers to inclusion while simultaneously creating opportunities that facilitate and encourage full participation. Effective strategic land use planning⁴ can create spaces and locate land uses in ways that address barriers to inclusion through:

- targeted and responsive planning outputs – and the processes used to inform that planning, such as evidence-based policies and strategies
- ongoing engagement with communities and service providers across government
- community collaboration.

Collaboration and information sharing across government, community and business sectors will create opportunities for joint initiatives. Data, research and building research partnerships can be used as a catalyst for sharing learning and understanding the efficacy of approaches – 'share what works'.

Land use planning policies and strategies that promote equitable dispersal of and access to services, employment, education, open public space, infrastructure and housing help to create places that are socially inclusive and provide equal opportunity for all community members.

What issues does the ACT Planning Strategy need to consider?

Social disadvantage

While Canberra is one of the most advantaged municipal areas in Australia, there are identified pockets of social exclusion and disadvantage, including specific locations and specific groups of people. The following groups in the Canberra community are considered at risk of experiencing social exclusion.





- **Older people:** While ACT residents are generally younger than the rest of Australia, the ACT population is ageing relatively rapidly. Over the year to 30 June 2009, there was a 1.3% increase in the number of ACT children aged 0-14 years and a 1.4% increase in the working population (aged 15-64 years). Comparatively, there was a 4.0% increase in the number of people aged 65 years and over (with an 8.0% increase in the number of people aged 85 years and over).⁵
- **People with physical disability and mental health issues:** The number of people who report having a disability in the ACT is 45,000 (14.2% of the population).⁶ In 2007-08 approximately 11.8% of the ACT population had a long-term (lasting six months or more) mental or behavioural problem.⁷ This rate was marginally above the 11.2% of the national population experiencing a long-term mental or behavioural problem.⁸
- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:** At the 2006 Census, there were approximately 4,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the ACT. This was 1.2% of the ACT population and 0.8% of the total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of Australia.⁹
- **People in lower socio-economic group:** Most people in the ACT enjoy comparatively higher living standards than other Australians, yet there are still some low socio-economic households living in disadvantage (i.e. diminished access to income, education, employment, secure housing and personal transportation). The 2006 Census estimated that approximately 8% of the ACT population (27,664 people) lived in districts that fall in the bottom lowest 30% of a Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) index.¹⁰
- **People with less education:** The ACT's education retention rate for full-time students from Year 7 to Year 12 of 85.2% was the highest of all Australian states and territories in 2008 and above the 74.5% national rate. While the ACT has had the highest retention rate for several years, the rate has been gradually declining over the last decade and is down from 91% in 1998.¹¹ The number of people aged 15-19 years not fully engaged in education and/or employment is 7.4% of ACT people, which is lower than the national 12.5%.¹²

An example of strategic land use planning that promotes social inclusion is the design of well-connected public spaces – cycle paths, public transport, recreation spaces and gathering spaces. Planning streetscapes and public spaces to be inviting, legible, consistent and easy to navigate will help reduce barriers and promote inclusion. For example, a public space that allows for an open cafe, pedestrians with strollers and wheelchairs and a public bench for people to stop, interact and enjoy the atmosphere enables more contact and movement choices in a community, thereby contributing to an area's enhanced social inclusiveness.¹³

Housing

In 2007-08, public housing comprised 8.5% of all ACT households. This is one of the highest proportions of public housing across all Australian jurisdictions, second only to the Northern Territory at 10.9% and favourably compared to the national average of 4.5%.¹⁴ While the ACT is one of the most affordable (non-government, private) rental markets in the country due to comparatively high income levels, the proportion of ACT households (income units) receiving the maximum amount of Commonwealth rental assistance is the highest in Australia, growing from 76.5% in June 2007 to 79% in June 2009 and well above the national June 2009 average of 71.7%.¹⁵

Economically disadvantaged people from deprived areas and are likely to suffer not only exclusion from society, but exclusion from services they may require and opportunities to make their lives better.¹⁶

Planning for new suburbs and urban renewal that invite growing up and ageing in place is key. That means walkable neighbourhoods with easy access to services and infrastructure, and community spaces that enhance access, inclusion and participation. Planning policies and strategies can encourage a variety of housing choice and affordability.

Transport systems

Through legislation and policy, land use planning can direct the development of a more equitable mix of housing types across the city with easy access to a choice of transport options. Further, land use planning that helps disperse businesses and different employment opportunities throughout towns and local centres can encourage places that are viable and vibrant, improving the quality and safety of the area.¹⁷ These places will allow more people to live closer to work and decrease the chance of socially exclusive areas.

Low density housing combined with lack of access to good transport options can lead to social isolation, which correlates with higher risks of social disadvantage. Recent transport disadvantage mapping shows Canberra performs better than the national average but parts of our city need better transport. This can be difficult to deliver due to circuitous road networks and very low density housing.

As Canberra's population ages, senior citizens who can no longer drive will expect alternative modes of transport. Our transport system needs to provide options for everyone; but it won't always be that transport will come to those who need it. We need to design our city so people can live where public transport is.

The ACT Government's updated draft policy Transport for Canberra, that supports linking cycling, walking and public transport with land uses along public transport corridors, commits to active and more sustainable transport systems.



Things to think about

A socially inclusive society will be achieved through¹⁸ better co-ordination and planning of infrastructure and services through the ACT Infrastructure Plan and Strategic Asset Management Plans to meet the diverse needs of Canberrans and maximise the liveability and sustainability of our city. Evaluation and monitoring of outcomes is required to ensure the impact of Government interventions are measured and understood.

Investment in community infrastructure promotes connection and allows for diverse activities. For example, new regional community centres are providing long term tenancies for over 40 community organisations across Canberra.

However, for many people social inclusion is generated by social interactions that occur in a non structured way. Supporting more flexible use of existing and new social infrastructure, such as schools, libraries and civic places, through co-location and provision of common facilities will help to encourage community interaction. Providing community halls, gardens, places of worship and recreational spaces can also encourage informal community participation by bringing together people with common of interest.

Further Reading

Canberra Social Plan

<http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/policystrategic/socialplan>

ACT Children's Plan 2010 – 2014

<http://www.children.act.gov.au/publications.htm>

ACT Youth People's Plan 2009 – 2014

<http://www.youth.act.gov.au/index.php/publications>

ACT Strategic Plan for Positive Ageing 2009 – 2014: Towards an Age-friendly City

http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/_data/assets/file/0011/104888/Strategic_Plan_for_Positive_Ageing.rtf

ACT Women's Plan 2010 – 2015

<http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/women>

Reconciliation Action Plan for the year 2009 - 2010

http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/64136/RAP_plan.pdf

ACT Multicultural Strategy 2010 – 2013

<http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/multicultural/publications>

Disability ACT Future Directions: A Framework for the ACT 2004 – 2008

http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/disability_act/future_directions

Australian Government on Social Inclusion

<http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>

Endnotes

- 1 Australian Government, 2011; *Social Inclusion – Opportunity and Capability to have a Voice*, Commonwealth of Australia, Australia.
- 2 European Union's Eurostat Taskforce on Social Exclusion and Poverty Statistics, 1998
- 3 ibid
- 4 Land use refers to the way in which land is used and the location of activities within a geographic area. Often activities are grouped into relatively basic categories, such as residential, industrial, recreational and commercial. Whilst strategic planning is an inter-disciplinary and multi-objective process of policy making involving visioning and goal setting, plan development, implementation tools, detailed site design and development, monitoring and evaluation.
- 5 Population by Age and Sex, Australian States and Territories, Jun 2009, Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 9 December 2009 (cat. no. 3201.0).
- 6 ABS National Health Survey, Summary of Results 2007-2008 (cat. no. 4364.0).
- 7 National Health Survey: Summary of Results; State Tables, 2007-2008 (Reissue), ABS, 25 August 2009 (cat. no. 4362.0).
- 8 National Health Survey: Summary of Results, 2007-2008 (Reissue), ABS, 25 August 2009 (cat. no. 4364.0).
- 9 Population Characteristics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2006, ABS, 27 March 2008 (cat. no. 4713.0 and 4713.8)
- 10 Census of Population and Housing: Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), 2006, ABS, 26 March 2008 (cat no. 2033.0.55.001).
- 11 Schools, Australia, 2008, Data Cube NSSC Table 64a – Apparent Retention Rates (STUDENTS) (1993 to 2008), ABS, 23 June 2009 (cat. no. 4221.0).
- 12 (Derived) Australian Social Trends, Data Cube – Education and Training, Table 2, ABS, 30 June 2009 (cat. no. 4102.0).
- 13 Healthy Spaces and Places; Social Inclusion, *Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing*, Australia. http://www.healthyplaces.org.au/site/social_inclusion.php
- 14 Australian Social Trends, Data Cube - Housing, ABS, 10 December 2009 (cat. no. 4102.0).
- 15 Report on Government Services 2010, Chapter 16A – Housing attachment, Productivity Commission, 29 January 2010.
- 16 Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, 2008; *Inclusion by Design – Equality, diversity and the built environment*, CAFE, UK.
- 17 ibid
- 18 ACT Government, 2010; The Canberra Social Plan 2010, ACT Government, ACT.