



# PLANNING, CLIMATE TRANSPORT

## Shared election platform for disability

### 2024 ACT Election

**ACT Down Syndrome Association**

Building 1, Pearce Community Centre, Pearce ACT, 2607

**Advocacy for Inclusion**

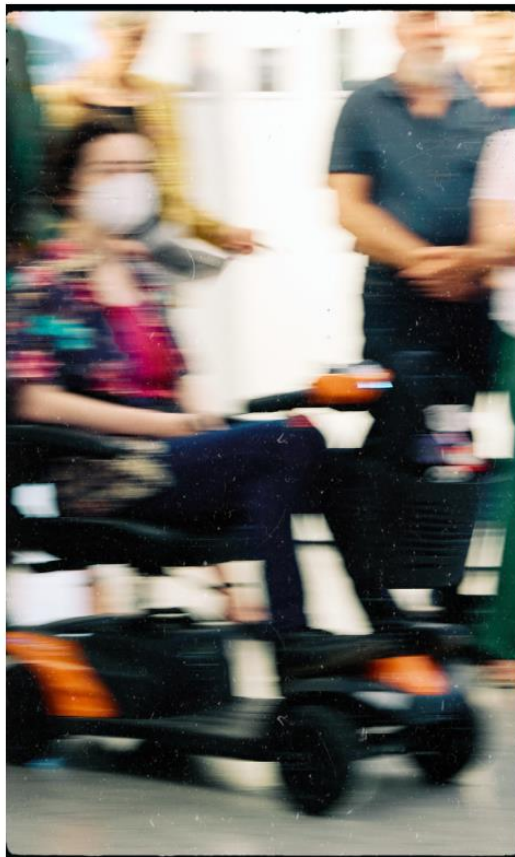
2.02 Griffin Centre, 20 Genge St Canberra City, 2601

**Mental Health Community Coalition**

Level 1, Griffin Centre, 20 Genge St, Canberra City, 2601

**Women with Disabilities ACT**

Building 1, Pearce Community Centre, Pearce ACT, 2607





# Planning, Climate and Transport

**Prepared by Advocacy for Inclusion**

**Issued on 2 May 2024**

We offer non-partisan priorities for the information of voters and candidates in the coming ACT election.

These represent our shared priorities for the election and candidates are also encouraged to speak to individual Disabled Peoples Organisations and representative bodies about our specific and detailed priorities.

**Issued by Advocacy for Inclusion, Women with Disabilities ACT, Mental Health Community Coalition ACT and ACT Down Syndrome and Intellectual Disability**

**Also endorsed by ACT Disability, Aged and Carer Advocacy (ADACAS), the Inner South Canberra Community Council, Living Streets Canberra, and the ACT Council of Social Services (ACTCOSS)**



**ADACAS**  
Advocacy



## Living Streets Canberra



**Inner South Canberra Community Council**



## Our Asks

In the coming ACT election, we ask candidates to commit to the following actions, decisions and investments to ensure Canberra is a well-planned and accessible city where people with disability can comfortably navigate a changing urban realm amidst responses to climate change that mitigate risks and ensure a just transition.

### Planning and infrastructure

- **Funding for a social planning unit** within the new ACT planning system focused on improving planning for universal design and ensuring lived experience voice of people with disability and older Canberrans is heard – launch by 2025
- Funding to **train planners, builders and certifiers** to improve accessibility – all key workers to be trained by end 2026
- Funding for a **rolling program of stock take, audits and accessibility improvements to spaces, places, urban infrastructure and community facilities** in the ACT guided by lived experience – complete by end 2025
- **Small grants to encourage accessibility improvements** in older precincts and premises – introduce by first quarter of 2026
- **Improve funding to community councils and DPOs** to develop shared work agendas on accessibility and support access by people with disability in municipal forums – across next term and put a **representative from DPOs on the Environment and Planning Forum or its equivalent**

### Transport

- **Diversify and improve the Wheelchair Accessible Taxi Fleet** – at least 3 non transit van taxis on the road by the end of the next term in 2028
- Accelerate the **replacement of the older Canberra Renault buses** – complete accessibility by 2025
- **Regulate Uber/Rideshare to require accessibility** by 2025
- **Regulate and better police micro mobility devices** – urgently in first 6 months of coming to government
- **Fund community transport adequately to meet demand** - ongoing
- **Train all customer facing public transport staff** in disability awareness with a lived experience component – by end 2025
- **Ensuring a variety of communication types are used at all public transport hubs and vehicles** with consistent usage of tools like audio description – consistent approach by end 2025
- **Undertake a cost benefit analysis for free public transport** – by end 2025





## Climate and energy

- Support the development of inclusive and **disability rights focussed principles for waste reduction, energy transition and climate change** through a dialogue between the disability rights community, government and the environment sector – hold dialogue during 2025 and enshrine principles by 2026
- **Install reverse cycle air-conditioning in the home of every frail and disabled public housing tenant** with temperature regulation issues by 2026.
- Including **mental health and disability in the ACT Climate Change Strategy** immediately
- Forming a **heatwave strategy that centres disability and chronic illness** by 2025.
- **Inclusive volunteering and education programs** that allow people to “do their bit” in climate change mitigation, disaster preparation, and community resilience by 2026.
- Work through national cabinet to press for a **disability lens within industry development** to improve the design of electric vehicles, charging stations and electric appliances and prioritise reliability of supply for vulnerable people – priority from 2024

## The issues

### Planning

People with disability often experience barriers to accessing public spaces and places due to poor planning and compliance as well as fraying streets and infrastructure.

Accessible spaces can be the difference between community living and independence and highly restricted lives for people with disabilities.<sup>1</sup> Public health and community development research demonstrates that the environments in which people carry out their daily activities are directly and critically related to health and well-being.<sup>2</sup>

To meet our promise as a Human Rights jurisdiction, and comply with CRPD, development in Canberra needs to meet and strive to exceed the minimum standards for disability access.

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<sup>1</sup> Layton, N., and Steel, E. (2015). ‘An environment built to include rather than exclude me: Creating inclusive environments for human well-being.’ *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 12, pp. 11146-11162.

<sup>2</sup> Baum, F. (2016). *The New Public Health*. 4<sup>th</sup> edition. Oxford University Press: Melbourne, Australia.



This means we need consistent application of the disability standards at the Australian Standard or above throughout the built environment in new developments. We also need a progressive program of retrofitting older suburbs to address access problem areas identified by a standing group of consumers with lived experience of these barriers.

The standards are a range (from minimum to maximum), including minimum features, higher features, and additional features beyond the standards. The ACT should aim to be ambitious and to ensure that (generally) high standards of access in the national capital precinct are mirrored in the urban heart and commercial centres and outlands of the city and its group centres.

For instance, the standards allow for left- and right-hand transfer toilets at different heights. However, toilets that comply with changing room requirements – that is, including a hoist – exceed the standards. Best practice should aim to provide a range of these facilities across Canberra, not only facilities meeting minimum standards.

While Changing Places toilets are welcome, we also need urgent work to ensure there are functioning AS 1428.1 standard disability toilets in urban centres that have none at all – for instance Charnwood, Fisher and Melba.

New policies which affect urban space (from parking, outdoor café seating, the introduction of touch screens and policies around e-scooters and shared paths) need to be reviewed with a disability lens. Some of this work is happening through the TCCS reference group but we need tighter and more focussed policy intent from Government. We also need it to translate to systemic fixes at street level.

Developers need to be encouraged to include people with disability in planning and developing major projects around the city. ACT Government buildings and shopfronts need to consistently demonstrate best practice and the ACT Government also needs to demonstrate good practice in its consultations.

We need planning policy that is guided by in-depth needs assessment work, a focus on social planning and more work to engage missing voices, especially people with disability who are largely invisible in planning debates despite being the most effected by planning outcomes for urban space as well as housing.

Noting the number of Heritage sites in the ACT, we support ensuring that the Heritage Council always includes people with expertise in accessibility within Heritage sites and this expertise should be prioritised in the Heritage Unit.

We support ACTCOSS in their calls for a social planning unit that ensures a social planning focus is at the centre of planning policy and that needs assessment and lived experience voice guides planning policies and practice. AFI believes a social planning unit should focus on accessibility and universal design as an early priority given population ageing and equity priorities.



Canberra is alight with planning conversations and controversies – but the paradox is that people with disability are rarely present in them despite being the most impacted. A single broken paving stone can ruin a whole outing, trap people in their homes or even shorten a life.

We specifically want people with disabilities to be more present in Canberra planning conversations and considerations on municipal government functions. This includes funding for the Community Councils to focus on accessibility and build participation by people with disabilities.

Our election asks are aimed at building disability voice, presence and knowledge into planning to avoid costly unintended outcomes and make our city a better place to live including for older people.

## **Transport**

While there are pockets of improvement transport for people with disabilities is inaccessible and broken and it's getting harder to move around safely.

Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, Australia's public transport systems were to be fully compliant with the 2002 Transport Standards by December 31, 2022. This target was not met or even approached.

The standards included the availability of lifts, access paths, toilets, ramps, handrails and grabrails, lighting, hearing augmentation, and more. Approximately half of Australia's public transport infrastructure is deemed to have actually met their targets.<sup>3</sup> In the ACT, for example, older inaccessible Renault diesel buses continue to be used into 2024.<sup>4</sup>

The current expansion of the electric vehicle (EV) market highlights issues for people with disability. The ACT currently has the fastest growing fleet of EVs.<sup>5</sup> Despite high levels of EVs, public charging infrastructure and facilities throughout the ACT remain sparse and often inaccessible. These newer vehicles are also being built with features that make them incompatible with disabled driver modifications. Designers of electric vehicles and accompanying charging infrastructure must do better at ensuring universal access to their products.

The lack of noise from EVs is an important safety issue, not just for people with vision impairments but for everyone.

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<sup>3</sup> Xiao, Alison (2023) '[Australia misses 20-year public transport accessibility target as many train and tram networks fail people with disabilities.](#)' ABC News, 17 January 2023.

<sup>4</sup> Isaac Nowroozi. (2024) '[ACT government stuck using old Renault buses for now, technically not in breach of Disability Discrimination Act.](#)' ABC News, 7 February 2024.

<sup>5</sup> ACT Government (2023) '[Canberra drivers lead the way in electric vehicles.](#)' Media Release, Shane Rattenbury MLA. 1 May 2023.



Shared and on demand mobility services are also largely designed without considering the access needs of people with disabilities. The major ridesharing Apps do not offer wheelchair accessible transport in Canberra – and yet we were an earlier adopter of them, and they are displacing other modes of transport like taxis.

There are increasingly complex considerations arising from an interplay between new technology, changes in use of urban spaces, government policy directions and social, climatic and economic change which are making it harder for people with disability to move around. For some people transport disadvantage is getting much worse.

Issues for people with disabilities include a rapid growth in the uptake of micro-mobility devices which can present a hazard to some people with disability in shared paths and an obstruction to seamless paths of travel. There is a growth in the use of shared zones as an urban design feature especially in larger cities – these can be confusing and hazardous spaces for people who are blind or have other sensory disabilities. Changes in vehicle design are also impacting people with disabilities.

Larger, more complex electronic vehicles resist some disabled driver and passenger modifications and can make vehicles harder for people with disabilities to travel in. Modern SUV style cars with high seats and a large gap between the door and the seat due to side airbags are inaccessible to many wheelchair users.

E-Scooters are adding to the mix. AFI are hearing more reports from people with disability and frail aged Canberrans regarding near misses or collisions with e-scooters on footpaths, bike-paths and within shared spaces. As part of this we hear from people who increasingly concerned and risk averse about travel on bike paths and footpaths. The rules on the use of e-scooters state that users must give way to pedestrians on paths. However, this is left to the discretion of each individual user and is impossible to enforce. Users are also required to slow down when riding around other people. Again, the responsibility to do so sits with the user.

Canberra's e-scooter regime requires improved infrastructure and signage, user and driver education, as well as expanded rule and legal enforcement. E-scooters largely operate in the absence of clear regulatory frameworks. If they are to become a fixed mode of transport then careful consideration needs to be given to how they fit within the broader transport, road- and street-use mix.

In some jurisdictions, including the ACT, there are also creeping changes to medical requirements around drivers which are restricting larger numbers of people from driving private cars.

These mix of issues which are creating an increasingly hostile and difficult transport context for some people require that public transport lift its ambitions, accessibility



and scope for people with disability as we move into the 2020's. Cost is also an issue for people with disability who are more likely to be excluded from the workforce and on low incomes. Our election asks for 2024 are aimed at reversing the trend and addressing pain points.

### **Climate, waste and energy**

People with disability are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and are often the first to feel its effects and the last people to be supported through climate change events.

Research shows that people with disability are two to four times more likely to die or be injured in a disaster than the general population. The risk of injury and loss of property is higher for people with disability and there are greater difficulties with evacuation and sheltering.

Following flooding in Queensland, people with disabilities were late to be evacuated and ran the risk of being left alone and behind. In Canberra people with disability with temperature regulation issues are the first to feel the extremes of heat and cold in climate change.

A just transition means that those with the most responsibility for waste and emissions should shoulder a proportionate level of reduction effort and the costs, inconvenience and pressure of waste reduction efforts should not fall disproportionately on those with the least capacity to meet them.

Some examples are the banning of plastic straws, plastic bags and proposals around disposable continence products. We retain concerns about the banning of plastic straws and steps to ban, limit, restrict from easy public access or impose price signals against single use continence products required by people with disabilities.

Energy transition also requires a disability lens.

People with disabilities are invested in the reliability of energy supply including people on home ventilation, users of CPAP and other machines and to change personal communication and transport equipment.

Some people with disabilities use older cars (or other older equipment) due to poverty or inaccessible design or complexity within new devices so emissions measures and changes to energy policy must also be nuanced and balanced.

Governments should work with manufacturers to ensure that industry standards, procurement and other levers encourage access *and* environmentally friendly product lines.

We believe that more work is needed to understand and develop appropriate responses for people disabilities to climate change which reconciles our additional vulnerability to climate change events with a just transition approach that recognises that climate mitigations, such as waste reduction measures, fall heavily on some groups of people with access needs.





Our election asks aim to begin this dialogue, begin key mitigations such as heatwave strategies and support people with the mental health impacts of climate change.

## The evidence

### Data points

- Around 1 in 5 Canberrans has a disability while Canberra has an ageing population. The 2018 ABS Social and Community Services Survey found that 19.4% of those in the ACT had disability, up from 16.2% in 2015.<sup>6</sup>
- Poor planning and access leads to adverse events, including falls for older people and admissions to acute care. Across Australia, approximately 25 percent of falls leading to hospitalisation occur in urban settings, for example on streets or highways, trade, service, and health service areas, as well as schools, and other specified areas.<sup>7</sup>
- In 2018-19, the number of hospitalised falls across Australia was 132,933 at a cost of \$4.3 billion.<sup>8</sup> Among hospitalisations due to a fall for older people almost all (93%) were classified as an emergency in terms of urgency of admission and the average length of hospital stay was 9.5 days.<sup>9</sup>
- Survey work on access issues across Canberra was conducted by the former PWDACT, now joined with AFI, in 2015/16. This found that access across the ACT was uneven with significant and sharp differences between the national capital precinct, new areas and older of the city:
- Transport is an essential service for people with disability to achieve full social and economic participation in the community. Across Australia, 17 per cent of people with disability aged 15 years and over who leave their homes have difficulty using some or all forms of public transport.<sup>10</sup> That is one in six. One in seven are not able to use public transport at all.
- There are a range of barriers to public transport, including:
  - Access issues due to steps
  - Difficulty getting to stops and stations
  - Fear and anxiety due to vehicle design
  - Public attitudes and personal safety

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<sup>6</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019) [Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings](#), Australian Government.

<sup>7</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022). [Falls in older Australians 2019-20: hospitalisations and deaths among people aged 65 and over](#). Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Accessed 11 November 2022.

<sup>8</sup> AIHW (2021) [Disease expenditure in Australia 2018-19](#). Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Accessed 11 November 2022.

<sup>9</sup> AIHW (2022) [Falls in older Australians 2019-20: hospitalisations and deaths among people aged 65 and over](#). Accessed 11 November 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2020) [People with Disability in Australia](#). Cat. No. DIS 72, AIHW, Canberra, p. 124.



- Staff conduct
  - Issues with boarding assistance animals
  - Lack of seating or difficulty standing
  - Cost.
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- A lack of access to public transport has discriminatory and disabling consequences these include contributing to
    - Reduced wellbeing due to social isolation – a recent [report](#) by Deloitte and the Achieve Foundation calculated a \$57 billion wellbeing bonus to Australia if we deliberately took steps to include people with disability
    - Difficulties maintaining economic and social participation
    - Additional vulnerability to situations of violence and abuse as people are unable to mobilise (or leave) and find refuge or services
    - Inability to gain and retain paid employment
    - Barriers to education and learning
    - Poverty and cost of living pressures (including both the costs of on demand transport and reduced earning capacity)
    - Downstream costs for NDIS and formal and informal support systems – accessible transport is one area where mainstream systems have not stepped up leaving the NDIS as an ‘oasis in the desert’ as noted in the Governments own NDIS review.
    - Delayed hospital discharge
    - Falls, injuries and accidents leading to admission to acute care, nursing care and early death
  
  - A spate of recent accidents causing serious injuries and deaths in the ACT, Queensland, and Victoria have prompted calls from the Australian Medical Association for tighter regulation of e-scooters.

#### People with disability speak:

*“My local park isn’t accessible so I can’t take my kids there to play” ACT Disability Strategy Consultations 2023*

*“Lack of affordable transport limits our access to social outings and means getting to and from basic appointments can take hours.” ACT Disability Strategy Consultations*

*“Sometimes I feel that climate change initiatives don’t account for how I need to live my life.” ACT Disability Strategy Consultations 2023*



*“There are ongoing access blackspots in Canberra which are hard to shift. These include improving access to the retail “courts” in Belconnen and Woden, older areas of Canberra like Manuka, parts of the city and intractable issues with wheelchair taxis. There is an uneven adoption of measures like tactile indicators, Auslan interpreting and access to web platforms” - PWDACT Access Survey 2016*

*“We once had an event at a venue that claimed to be accessible, but really wasn’t at all.*

*They had an accessible toilet, but it was located at the bottom of a very slippery hallway and a set of uneven steps, with no safety rail.*

*I was using my walker and could barely fit down the walkway. If I had been in more pain than I was that night, I wouldn’t have been able to go to the bathroom.*

*On that particular night, I also wasn’t able to engage with other people as well as I should have been able to. My walker couldn’t fit in between the tables and chairs properly, so I was forced to stay at the very end of the table all night.*

*There were easily 50 or 60 people who attended that night that I weren’t able to engage with – people that I potentially could have been friends with.*

*“The whole situation made me feel like people like me aren’t important enough to worry about.”*

*When it comes to accessibility, people often think that if they check off the right boxes, they have done everything they need to do.*

*They don’t take into account how things will work in real terms.*

*AFI NDIS Review Consultations – 2023*



## **More information on Planning, Climate and Transport**

Submission on transport: <https://www.advocacyforinclusion.org/afi-submission-on-the-review-of-the-accessible-transport-standards/>

Submission on climate: <https://www.advocacyforinclusion.org/inquiry-into-human-rights-healthy-environment-amendment-bill-2023/>

Submission on energy transitions: <https://www.advocacyforinclusion.org/submission-to-the-consultation-on-the-pathway-to-electrification-in-the-act/>

Submission on streets, intersections and urban decay: <https://www.advocacyforinclusion.org/afi-submission-on-draft-design-guides-for-streets-and-intersections/>

Submission on heritage: <https://www.advocacyforinclusion.org/inquiry-into-act-heritage-arrangements/>

Submission on e-scooters: <https://www.advocacyforinclusion.org/expansion-of-e-scooters-in-the-act/>

Submission on planning: <https://www.advocacyforinclusion.org/submission-on-planning-bill-2022/>

## **More information on election polices:**

Go to the 2024 ACT disability election hub to find our collected asks and information on other platform policy areas as we approach the October ACT election at <https://www.advocacyforinclusion.org/our-services/policy/>

## **More information on voting and the election:**

Don't forget to enrol to vote, check your enrolment and be part of the election process. More information is here: [https://www.elections.act.gov.au/electoral\\_enrolment](https://www.elections.act.gov.au/electoral_enrolment)

Check out Elections ACT's Enrolment information including for voters with a disability here (includes Easy English information): <https://www.elections.act.gov.au/education/electors-with-disability>