

ACT Election 2020: Climate and Energy – achieving a just transition to net zero emissions in the ACT

The ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS) yesterday released the eighth of twelve 2020 ACT Election issue briefs calling for parties and candidates to work to fulfill the promise of a just transition to net zero emissions in the ACT by 2045 or sooner.

ACTCOSS CEO Dr Emma Campbell said: “Action on climate change is a social justice issue. People living in low-income households are more likely to be negatively impacted by climate change. These households are also at risk of being left behind as we transition away from fossil fuels such as natural gas for our heating and cooking, and petrol and diesel for our cars and buses.

“We must act on climate change mitigation and adaptation in a way that does not entrench or exacerbate disadvantage. We need the next ACT Government to develop a clear plan for a just transition to net zero emissions that ensures low-income households have access to more affordable, renewable energy; to the benefits of distributed energy resources (e.g. solar panels); and to healthy and affordable housing that is energy efficient.

“A socially just response to climate change should be aimed to reduce poverty and inequality and improve wellbeing. This plan for a just transition must be based on extensive and genuine community engagement. Climate change planning should be inclusive and collaborative – including on disaster resilience – to capture the range of networks, relationships, expertise, and knowledge available.

“Energy affordability for low-income households in the ACT is a key concern. In the past five years, prices for electricity and gas have risen by 25% and 31% respectively. We have welcomed increases in the ACT Government’s Utilities Concession over this time to support households to cope with rising energy bills along with the introduction of the Energy Support Voucher Program with co-contributions from ACT Government and energy retailers. These supports need to be maintained, ensuring they are available to all who need them.

“Many consumers would be better off by changing their plan or switching to another retailer but find it too difficult to compare market offers. ACTCOSS is calling on the next ACT Government to require energy retailers to tell their customers if they have a plan that could reduce their bills by providing regular ‘better offer notifications’ as recommended by the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission (ICRC) in June 2020.

“The next ACT Government must maintain and expand programs to support low-income and rental households to improve energy efficiency and productivity, making their homes healthier and more affordable. Low-income households often cannot afford the upfront cost of improvements such as insulation or solar panels that would provide them with long-term

savings. Many rent their homes where there is a split incentive barrier to landlords paying for property improvements that would deliver energy savings to tenants.

“ACTCOSS wants the next ACT Government to stick to the timeline set out in the *ACT Climate Change Strategy 2019-25* to introduce legislation for staged minimum energy performance requirements for rental properties by the end of 2021 to come into force in 2022-23 at the latest.

“Over the next two years, in partnership with Care Financial Counselling Service, ACTCOSS will continue our role as an advocate for residential, not-for-profit, and small business energy consumers in the ACT through the ACT Energised Consumers Project. This project is co-funded by Energy Consumers Australia and the ACT Government. It is critical that we maintain a strong voice for energy consumers in the ACT, especially during a time of significant transformation in how our energy is generated, distributed, and consumed in ways that reduce greenhouse gas emissions.”

Dr Campbell concluded: “We need to urgently address climate change, and we must not leave anyone behind. A critical task for the next ACT Government will be to work with the community to plan a clear path to achieving a just transition to net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045 or even sooner. Our vision for a just transition is that it will create a more just, equitable, and sustainable Canberra. This is the vision we expect to share with the next ACT Government.”

Quote from **Carmel Franklin, CEO, Care Financial Counselling Service and the Consumer Law Centre of the ACT**

“Currently there are more people out of work. Many of those that do still have jobs are working from home. During the Coronavirus Pandemic energy retailers have provided extensions of time to pay bills. Soon these extensions will be up, winter bills will arrive and be higher for many people who have spent so much time at home, and government support will decrease.

“We are bracing for a significant spike in people experiencing energy hardship and are particularly concerned for those whose health and wellbeing is at risk if they cannot pay their bills.”

Quote from **Helen Oakey, Executive Director, Conservation Council ACT Region**

“Nearly 80% of our greenhouse emissions in the ACT come from using gas in our houses and driving cars. The emissions cuts we need to make to reach zero net emissions will involve changes by the community, whether that’s switching houses off gas or shifting from petrol to electric vehicles which can run on clean, renewable electricity.

“But it’s crucial that the whole community is supported to upgrade to new appliances and vehicles, and that low-income households are not left behind using increasingly expensive and old technologies. The good news is that if households are supported to upgrade to energy efficient electric appliances, and even electric vehicles, that running costs will be lower. We can and must afford to invest in a just transition for all Canberrans.”

Find ACTCOSS’s 2020 ACT Election [issue brief *Climate and Energy: A Just Transition* here.](#)

Find other issue briefs at ACTCOSS’s [ACT Election page.](#)

ACTCOSS advocates for social justice in the ACT and represents not-for-profit community organisations.

**For more information or comment, please contact
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