

SUBMISSION

INTEGRATED ENERGY PLAN

The Integrated Energy Plan will guide the ACT's energy transition to help us meet our legislated target of zero net emissions by 2045.

By

St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn

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INTRODUCTION

The St. Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn (the Society) welcomes the opportunity to respond to public consultation on the Integrated Energy Plan by the ACT Government.

The St. Vincent de Paul Society (the Society) is a member based lay Catholic organisation that has been assisting people experiencing poverty and disadvantage in the region since 1924. We seek to shape a more just and compassionate society by working to address the causes of poverty and injustice, with a focus on prevention and early intervention.

As a registered charitable not for profit organisation, we are operational in the Australian Capital Territory and in surrounding southern and western regional areas of New South Wales. The Society's conference model of support has members¹ of the Society undertake visits to the homes of people experiencing disadvantage, including those at risk of homelessness. Members refer those at risk to our homelessness services, where staff then offer case management, support services, and referral to other agencies to help prevent people becoming homeless.

There are presently² 520 Members, 1482 volunteers and 242 employees working to deliver person-centred support and assistance to those in need in our community.

ABOUT THE SUBMISSION

The Society's position is informed by our role as a leading charity and service delivery organisation, supporting vulnerable people in the Canberra/Goulburn region and delivering the Home Energy Efficiency Program³ on behalf of the ACT Government since 2011.

In 2015, St. Vincent de Paul Society became the sole service provider for ACT Government's Home energy efficiency program for low income. Since then;

- 5,426 Households have received energy efficiency support.
- 1565 households have been provided with thermally efficient curtains.
- Over 5,000 heated throw rugs and energy-saver kits have been provided.
- Over 379 high-quality quilts have been provided.
- 847 fridges have been provided.

Of the 5,426 houses assisted, 555 households are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, and 1,019 are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

In 2021-22⁴, three of our energy officers became the first in Canberra to be accredited as National Energy Scorecard assessors (like a NatHERS energy rating, but for existing homes).

People on low incomes are twice as likely to have heat related health impacts when compared to people on higher incomes. The Society encounters hundreds of households each year that report health and wellbeing complaints and extreme discomfort stemming from a rationing of heating or

¹ A Conference Member of the Society is a volunteer who joins a conference and attends regular meetings which include scripture discussion, prayer, reflection and how to improve assistance given within the local conference area. A member takes part in the work of the Society providing assistance through charitable works including home visitation.

² As of January 31, 2023.

³ ACT Government, "Everyday Climate Choices" [Home Energy Efficiency Program](#) Accessed on September 11, 2023

⁴ St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn [Home Energy Efficiency Program: The Facts](#). Accessed on September 11, 2023

cooling due to the related expense, or who are struggling with the financial implications of running cheap and inefficient electrical appliances.

RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

ABOUT THE INTEGRATED ENERGY PLAN

1. Do you think the proposed Integrated Energy Plan principles to guide the ACT Government will support a successful transition to electrification in the ACT? Are there any areas missing?

Response:

- Yes: The Society agrees with the eight principles outlined for the transition.

DEVELOPING THE FUTURE ENERGY NETWORK AND SHARING THE COSTS

2. What are the barriers to uptake of consumer energy resources and other technology, such as batteries, solar panels and electric vehicles?

Response:

- Cost Of Uptake of New Technology: We observe that, for the cohort our programs support and have engagements with cost of uptake would be biggest barrier to transitioning to an all-electric energy supply. Information on the payback period for solar panel installation is also not wholly available. Cost of maintenance for EVs in the context of low-income households needs to be explored further.
- Misinformation Leading to Anxiety: The Society observes a lot of misinformation about the electrification process and what it would potentially look like in the ACT. There is no comprehensive information, research, and relatable case studies about the real-life benefits to families who switched completely to all electric in the ACT context. This we have noticed is creating reasonable levels of anxiety among those we support and serve.
- Effective Public Transport System: The second-hand market for electric vehicles has not developed as compared to the second-hand market for combustion engines. For residents in low-income households who primarily depend on the second-hand market to procure their vehicles, an effective public transport system that connects the ACT extremely well would be good alternative.

3. What are the benefits of the ACT using a consumer-led approach during the first IEP (to 2030) to transition the ACT towards electrification? A consumer-led approach means the community will be encouraged to transition off gas at a time that suits them. Consumers will decide if and when they adopt consumer energy resources, such as solar and batteries, and electric vehicles. (a) Do you think there is any benefit for a staged transition approach following an initial consumer-led transition? What would be the barriers of such an approach? For example, after 2030, this could be a suburb-by-suburb staged transition approach. (b) Do you have a preference for any approach?

Response:

- Real-Time Assessment of Benefits and Challenges: The consumer-led approach offers all stakeholders the opportunity to assess in real-time the challenges for uptake within the different cohorts of the community. This provides community organisations the chance to observe and see how those we serve adapt to the process of change and to implement programs that can address identified psychosocial issues that come with the transition process.
- Staged Transition best fit Renters: Renters are consumers that cannot lead transitioning. Same may be the case for residents of public housing facilities. This cohort are not primary decision makers on how their homes transition. Factoring them into the staged transition as part of government policy intervention would be necessary.

It is important to add here that there is potential for this cohort to experience some form of energy inequity. We recommend complementary Government intervention that addresses the issue of energy inequity within this cohort throughout the transition process.

- *The Society prefers the proposition of implementing both approaches within the timelines proposed in the Integrated Energy Plan.*

ELECTRIFYING OUR COMMUNITY

4. **What can be done to further encourage electrification among those households that have the means to do so?**

Response:

- Incentivize households with the means to electrify: These households may delay in changing over. To reduce their hesitancy, the Government can provide a series of incentives. These could be incentives around reduced cost of electricity over a period or tax rebates on the initial cost involved in setting.
5. **Is there a role for regulation to support the community when choosing between gas and electric appliances? (a) How could point of sale information support consumers when replacing appliances or should gas assets be disclosed in a property transaction (sale or rental)?**

Response:

- Regulation on Information disclosure pertaining to the Integration Energy Plan: There is the need to have retailers of gas products and real estate agents disclose information on the Integrated Energy Plan to their customers. Would-be buyers of these products would be informed about future potential cost as a result of the transition process.

6. Which members of the community are most at risk of being negatively impacted during the transition? (a) If we were to provide targeted support for low-income households or those who can't transition themselves, what could this be? (b) What specific actions could the government take to best support these households?

Response:

- *Asset owners who are on Fixed Low Income: Recently unemployed house owners, and in some cases pensioners who are on a fixed income may need attention through policy support and funding to be able to finance their transition.*
- *Existing Vulnerable Groups – Elderly Women, Students: The ACT Government, at the household level, is already funding some the Everyday Climate Choices⁵ initiatives. Increasing the funding to both widen and deepen the reach of that initiative would allow more support to be tailored to cohorts such as listed above. Students, who are mostly transitional in their renting lifecycle would need support. The numbers of women⁶ coming to the Society for support is noticeably increasing.*
- *Increase funding for Case Management Support: As impact is likely to vary based on individual situations, funding for case management programs throughout the various phases would go a long way. Our observation through our Emergency Response programs indicates low-income renters, students, and the elderly as a high-risk cohort likely to be impacted negatively by the transition.*

Complementing this, should also be targeted communication that address the specific needs of communities and respective age cohorts (example Pensioners, Elderly).

ELECTRIFYING COMPLEX BUILDINGS

7. How can government work with industry and financiers (such as green finance and investors) to electrify complex buildings? (a.) How can government work with community and community organisations to ensure a smooth transition for those living in complex buildings?

Response:

- *Residents of complex buildings have less capacity to influence their transition: Government can work with community organisations to ensure the appropriate policy environment is created to mandate body corporates, who own and manage complex buildings, prioritise the needs of individual renters and owners. For this group, the decision to transition may be out of their hands.*

⁵ ACT Government, "Everyday Climate Choices: [Everyday Climate Choices](#) accessed on September 11, 2023

⁶ In the year 2022, out of the received through our Call Centre: Women formed 66% of all people who were assisted. This translates to 1527 women in absolute terms. 63% of the women (the 66% assisted) fall within the ages of 25-49 years; and 22% fall within the 50-64 years age group. Food represented 37% of all requests; followed by travel cost (16%), clothing (14%) and bedding/blankets (10%)

8. What should be the role of body corporates in preparing for the transition?

Response:

- Lead the conversation with the development of Guidelines: Body Corporates understand the demands of owning and using complex buildings within the ACT. It is important to hear from them about the practical pathways that exist for the electrification of complex buildings.

In doing so, body corporates can work with the Government to develop guidelines. This could include guidelines on electrifying existing complex buildings and on the standards needed for future complex buildings.

ELECTRIFYING BUSINESS

9. What are the different transition challenges for small to medium business and how could existing programs be improved?

Response:

- Cost of Uptake of New Technology: The initial cost of uptake is a major challenge. Different financing models can be explored to address the unique scenarios of businesses.
- Incentivize Businesses: Similar to the household-level actions, Government can look into what types of incentives will motivate businesses to take the step now rather than later. Businesses that have access to their own parking lots can be incentivized to install charging pots. Some incentives around tax rebates should be explored.

SKILLS AND WORKFORCE FOR THE TRANSITION

- 12. How can we increase the number of skilled workers in electrical trades?**
- 13. What opportunities exist for industry wage and work conditions, that could assist with workforce attraction and retention?**
- 14. How can we best support gas workers to transition their skills to be part of the net zero economy, for example in electrical trades, sustainable buildings and electric vehicle auto servicing?**

Response:

- Retrain and Reskill Current Skilled Workers in the Gas ecosystem: The current skilled workers within the Gas ecosystem need to be supported to transition into the electric ecosystem. This could take the form of free or subsidized training and licensing. This will ensure we better manage the loss of livelihood as a result of the change process and guarantee the availability of skilled workers for the electric ecosystem.
- Educational Policy Reforms: Educational Reforms to be put in place to ensure we are prepared for the all-electric economy in 2045.

RELEVANT CASE STUDIES

Case studies highlight the lived experiences of Canberrans and provide the detail of some of impact of services that community sector organisations such as Vinnies make through the programs and services that they offer.

Case Study 1: Preference: Adapting to the Electric Cooktop

'Vinnies Home Energy Efficiency Program for the low-income visited Natlee, a six-year-old Housing ACT (HACT) tenant's home, in 2019 and referred her home for the government heater upgrade and gas to the electric program.

Under the program, she received a reverse cycle system for her old gas heating. The program also removed the old gas hot water system and upgraded to an electric heat pump hot water system and an electric cooktop for the gas cooking appliance.

She loved the reverse cycle system, which is better than the old heater, but she didn't like the electric cooktop and preferred the gas cooking.

However, later that year, HACT moved her to another property with full gas appliances.

Case Study 2: Large family supported to settle in their new home.

The Vinnies Emergency Helpline received a call from Housing ACT (Specialist Housing Practitioner) to refer a family of 12 who had lost their home in a recent fire. This family was relocated to a new empty home and had nothing with them.

The Helpline liaised with Housing ACT, discussed material aid that could be provided by Vinnies and referred Housing ACT to other services that could fill in the gaps. The Helpline forwarded this request to the local Conference volunteers who supplied the family with a fridge, washing machine, dryer, and food/clothing vouchers.

The Conference volunteers referred the family to the Vinnies Energy Efficiency team for curtains and the Mitchell Warehouse for mattresses.

The Energy Efficiency team visited the family in their new home to measure and fit curtains, and the Warehouse team delivered the mattresses to the family, all within a period of 4 days from receipt of the initial request.

ABOUT THE ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY CANBERRA / GOULBURN

The Society implements many programs that deliver services to a cross section of the vulnerable population within the ACT, some of which are outlined below.

Street to Home Program supports people who are ‘sleeping rough’ and/or experiencing long term chronic homelessness through case management and assertive outreach. The program provided case management to 75 rough sleepers and outreach to 184 more in the last year.

Families and Youth Program provides outreach support services to families and young people in the ACT currently at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness to enable them to access and maintain safe, secure, independent, and affordable housing. The program supported 112 families throughout the year.

Samaritan House is a 13-bed facility in Canberra that provides crisis accommodation and support for men experiencing homelessness, working to break the cycle of chronic and acute homelessness. The service supported 79 men throughout the year.

Blue Door Program is a drop-in centre located in the middle of Ainslie Village in Canberra. It provides support to those living in the village and beyond in the form of meals, emergency relief material aid, information, referral, and support. The service had about 1,500 drop-ins per month and provided some 34,000 free meals throughout the year.

Night Patrol operates across Canberra and Queanbeyan on every night of the year from its 2 vans and with the support of 300 volunteers. It provides food, material items such as jackets, sleeping bags and hygiene items, and most importantly, an opportunity to engage socially with companions who are experiencing homelessness and/or social isolation. It served 7,992 companions throughout the year and provided 5,212 material items.

Community Inclusion Program, which operates out of the Oaks Estate and is designed to offer support for people living with psycho-social disabilities who are ineligible for National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) funding. It is funded by an Information, Linkages and Capacity Building Grant from the Australian Federal Government. It exists to build innovative ways to increase the independence, social and community participation of people with a psychosocial disability who are ineligible for the National Disability Insurance Scheme. It provides advocacy, support, information, referral case management and the development of activities in response to identified needs. The program supported 276 companions throughout the year.

Justice Housing Program provides accommodation options for individuals who otherwise would remain in detention due to a lack of suitable community-based accommodation. The program also provides accommodation support services to women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people involved with the criminal justice system, with a focus on trauma informed, gender-informed and culturally safe practices. Funded by the ACT Government, the program is a core element of its Building Communities Not Prisons initiative, which seeks to address the lack of available and affordable housing for people released from custody.

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