

ACT GOVERNMENT CONCESSIONS POLICY

INTRODUCTION

The ACT Government is committed to promoting equity in the standard of living and access to essential services for the ACT community, through the provision of a concessions program.

The ACT Government conducted a review of ACT Government Concessions in 2007 that involved consultation with community and government agencies, a literature review and an analysis of concession programs in the ACT and other jurisdictions. A key outcome of this review was to develop a policy framework to guide the management and administration of ACT Government Concessions.

It is intended that this policy framework will guide the development of any future concessions initiatives.

AIMS

The aims of ACT Government Concessions are to support:

- Access to essential services such as housing, healthcare, transport, and utilities;
- Equity of access to essential services for low income, disadvantaged or vulnerable people;
- Other ACT Government policies such as environmental objectives through public transport and renewable energy; and
- Opportunities for everyone to participate and contribute to our community.

This policy framework is one way to ensure that community members have reliable access to information about the wide range of concessions available to them in the Territory.

POLICY CONTEXT

The ACT Government's *Canberra Plan – Towards Our Second Century*, is the key policy document that states the Government's commitment to the ACT community. It is an expression of the Government's vision that Canberra becomes a place where all people are encouraged to participate, make a contribution and share the benefits of our community. It expresses the Government's commitment to the principles of access, equity and participation. It sets the direction for funding and future planning of assistance, including concessions, to ease financial pressure on low income households, fostering an inclusive community that supports its vulnerable and enables all to reach their full potential. It explores the ways to extend support and assistance to the ACT community through concessions.

The Canberra Plan – Towards Our Second Century addresses issues affecting the community's most vulnerable and disadvantaged with a vision to creating a more socially inclusive community.

ACT Government concessions are one way to promote access to essential services. Concessions work alongside a range of ACT Government policies and programs, as outlined in the table below :

This policy framework aims to provide equity in delivery of concessions within the secondary assistance target group.

Universal Assistance <i>Available to all ACT residents</i>	Secondary Assistance <i>Targeted to individuals and households who meet certain eligibility requirements</i>	Tertiary Assistance <i>Targeted to individuals who are experiencing hardship and unable to pay expenses</i>
Provision of free or low cost essential services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health • Education • Public Transport 	Assistance to prevent excessive expenses and assistance to pay expenses to make essential services more affordable: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concessions for electricity, water, rates, public transport • Rental rebates – public housing • Water saving rebates – purchasing water tanks • Assisting households reduce consumption 	Help with debt to maintain access to essential services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial counselling services • Essential Services Consumer Council • Debt policies

CONCESSIONS IN THE ACT

The ACT Government assists low income households by funding concessions for essential services and hardship policies and programs. The Australian Government assists low income households by providing benefits, pensions a scaled taxation system and concessions on services within its responsibility, such as telecommunications and pharmaceuticals.

For the purpose of this policy, a concession is defined as:

a reduction, discount, subsidy, rebate, waiver or exemption provided by the government on the value of goods, services or associated fees to an individual, family, household or organisation. Concessions are generally provided on the basis of low income, special needs or disadvantage, or some other special category such as age or war service.

The ACT Government provide a range of concessions. Some concessions benefit individuals (for example, rebates on spectacles) while others benefit families and households (for example, discounts on household expenses). Other concessions benefit the service users of hospitals, community organisations and religious groups (for example, discounts on water usage).

Generally concessions are provided through discounts on fees and charges for services such as transport, electricity and water. Concessions are also delivered through rebates – a partial refund following a purchase for goods such as spectacles.

Concessions are primarily provided to ACT residents who hold a Pensioner Concession Card or Health Care Card issued by the Australian Government. Some concessions are also provided to holders of a Veterans Gold Card issued by the Department of Veterans Affairs and other targeted population groups.

POLICY PRINCIPLES

The ACT Concessions Policy is underpinned by four principles which are intended to lead the way for a more equitable and accessible system of concessions. These principles are:

- Equity;
- Effectiveness;
- Accessibility; and
- Transparency.

Principle 1 - Equity

Concessions are targeted to those with the greatest needs.

Concessions promote equity of access to essential services, where people are treated equally and where people with greater needs are given greater levels of assistance. People who have a lower income and high expenses (for example, associated with managing a chronic illness or disability) experience difficulties in accessing affordable services and have a greater need for concessions.

Principle 2 - Effectiveness

Concessions assist with access to essential services considered fundamental to a reasonable quality of life.

Concessions are effective in improving the affordability of essential services for people on low incomes. Concessions provide opportunities for people on low incomes to participate and contribute to our community. Any targeting of concessions aims to avoid creating poverty traps, where recipients are discouraged from building greater financial independence and/or capacity (for example, by moving into work).

Principle 3 - Accessibility

Information about concessions is accessible to all low income individuals and households in the ACT

People who are eligible for concessions are aware of their entitlements. Information about concessions is readily available and easily understood and in a format that can be accessed. Information dissemination strategies pro-actively address language, cultural, disability and information technology barriers.

Principle 4 - Transparency

Concessions are regularly monitored, reviewed and reported.

It is important that concessions are regularly monitored, reviewed and reported to ensure they achieve the principles of equity, effectiveness, accessibility and transparency and are administered in a cost effective way.

