



Strong community support for #RaisetheAge

ACTCOSS media release, Saturday 06 November 2021

The ACT Council of Community Service (ACTCOSS) has today commended the ACT Government on its progress towards raising the age of criminal responsibility in the ACT.

In its Listening Report, the ACT Government found that 90 per cent of submissions supported raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 years. It also showed that:

- this change is required to protect the safety and wellbeing of the Territory's children and young people
- medical evidence clearly shows that children under the age of 14 are developmentally and neurologically unable to form criminal intent and should not be held criminally responsible for their actions; and
- there is limited support for the creation of exceptions or 'carve outs' to the minimum age for serious or repetitive behaviour.

The Listening Report also emphasised the need for significant investment in appropriate therapeutic and other services so that vulnerable children with problematic behaviours and their families have access to the necessary support.

ACTCOSS CEO, Dr Emma Campbell said: "All the evidence tells us that prison is no place for children. Not only is the brain of a child under 13 years of age not yet

sufficiently developed to understand criminal responsibility, we know that imprisoning kids only makes them far more likely to become repeat adult offenders.

"If diverted from the youth justice system, the needs of children under 14 can be addressed by appropriate services in youth homelessness, child protection, and mental health. Providing early and alternative supports to children and their families will deliver better outcomes for everyone.

"Kids belong in school and with their families and communities, not in prison cells. There is not a single shred of credible research that says putting children in jail helps them develop as useful members of society or that it reduces crime. This barbaric and damaging practice must end.

"Instead of locking children up we should be taking seriously our shared responsibility for their wellbeing and investing in programs and services that support them and their families before it's too late. There is plenty of evidence for what works, we simply need to make that choice to invest in our children's futures.

"ACTCOSS is proud to be based in the ACT, which is leading the country through its commitment to #RaisetheAge. We applaud the work done by the ACT Government and Attorney-General Shane Rattenbury and others to progress this critical issue and call on other jurisdictions to follow suit and take decisive, positive action," Dr Campbell said.

The Listening Report and submissions can be found on the [ACT Government YourSay website](#).

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

**For more information or comment, please contact
Dr Emma Campbell, CEO, ACTCOSS, on 0424 910 617 or 02 6202 7200.**