



ELECTION 2020

# Recover, Re-energise, Reform 20 steps in 2020

*What business needs from the  
next ACT Government*



September 2020



## Canberra Business Chamber

Canberra Business Chamber is the ACT's peak private sector organisation. Our membership consists of more than 600 leading businesses, as well as most of the Territory's industry and professional associations (our "kindred organisations"), who in turn represent many thousands of other businesses.

The Chamber dates back to 1932 and is one of the founding members of the national peak business body, the Australian Chamber of Commerce & Industry. We represent every industry sector and type of enterprise found in the ACT, from large high-tech globally competitive firms, through to micro-businesses, retailers, service sector providers, manufacturers, the professions and not-for-profit organisations.

Our statement of purpose, adopted in May 2019, is clear: to drive the economic prosperity and growth of Canberra through business. The Chamber leads the discussion on the business and economic conditions facing the ACT, provides a range of services to our members, and helps members thrive and grow. We provide a public voice for the business community, provide assistance and information for local firms, and deal regularly with the Chief Minister, Ministers, parliamentarians and other decision-makers to advocate for a stronger economy.

### **This year's ACT parliamentary elections provide a chance for parties to demonstrate their commitment to local business and creating local jobs.**

This plan to recover, re-energise and reform the ACT economy reflects the four priority areas identified by our members and the broader capital region business community:

- **Drive economic recovery, growth and diversity.**
- **Ensure we have the right workforce and skills for the future.**
- **Make it easier for ACT businesses to startup, grow and compete.**
- **Support small business and encourage entrepreneurship.**

*Is your vote supporting local business?*

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# ELECTION 2020

## 20 Policies for the Next ACT Government

### Drive economic recovery, growth and diversity.

- 1 Work with the business community to develop a comprehensive strategy for economic recovery, business growth and a transition to the “new normal” of a post-COVID trading environment.
- 2 Establish a clear long-term plan for the effective management of the Territory’s public finances.
- 3 Actively pursue and support the growth of emergent new industry sectors.
- 4 Provide a major infrastructure implementation strategy, utilising all available financing options. Start work on an upgraded National Convention Centre, Canberra Sports Stadium and EPIC.
- 5 Immediately invest in the development and building of more social housing and affordable housing.
- 6 Fund local precinct improvements with local business group input.
- 7 Continue the current program of small-scale precinct project funding beyond the 2020-21 financial year.

### Ensure we have the right workforce and skills for the future.

- 8 Work with the local business community to develop a workforce plan and skills strategy for the ACT region.
- 9 Adopt a clear statement of government’s desired population level for the ACT.

### Make it easier for ACT businesses to startup, grow, and compete.

- 10 Create a Minister for Business and streamline the ministerial portfolios that impact upon business.
- 11 Convert the temporary Business Commissioner role into a statutory Small Business Commissioner.
- 12 Freeze commercial rates and review the commercial rates regime in consultation with business.
- 13 Review the operations of the Secure Local Jobs Code, its governance and certification processes.
- 14 Provide multi-year contracts to local not-for-profit organisations providing social and community services.
- 15 Review and reform the current workers’ compensation system.
- 16 Cease imposing additional director liabilities in law unless it is part of a national agreement to do so.

### Support small business and encourage entrepreneurship.

- 17 Provide one-off cash support grants to small businesses in financial need.
- 18 Continue funding the small business advisory program, and expand the support services it can offer.
- 19 Continue to fund CBRIN and also actively support mature SMEs seeking to innovate and become more digitally savvy.
- 20 Provide mental health support services for business owners under stress, or at risk of business failure.

# The ACT Economy in 2020

Once considered a public service town, Canberra and the surrounding capital region is now home to Australia's fastest growing business population.

Times have changed, and the Canberra community now relies on the private sector as the main source of job opportunities, new employment creation, and future economic growth.

**In June 2019, the ACT had over 30,000 private sector businesses. Many of them are recognised global leaders in their field, and around 99% of these firms are small businesses.<sup>1</sup>**

**Most of our jobs are now found in the private sector. By late 2019, around 144,000 people (nearly two-thirds of our workforce) were working in private enterprise, while the public sector only employed around 87,000 staff.<sup>2</sup>**

The business sector has been growing. The overall number of businesses here increased by 5% during the 2018-19 financial year — the fastest growth rate in Australia. Private investment in the Territory rose, whereas public investment declined. Retail turnover in the ACT also increased at almost twice the national rate, and residential construction growth helped support our building industry when the sector has been struggling nationwide.

While this rapid transformation brings many benefits to the community, it is also fraught with risks. The ACT private sector is driven by a handful of key industries, including tourism, education, and construction. The Territory also has the highest annual business exit rate in Australia. Furthermore, our economic diversification is yet to mature. The Territory government remains dependent on the federal government for much of its own funding and infrastructure spending.

The impacts of recent global, national and local events, including extreme weather events and the global COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrate these risks. Many shops, stores and factories were physically damaged because of smoke, fires



and hailstorms. Many enterprises had to close their doors for an extended period, most businesses have had to abruptly move to an online trading environment, and restrictions on the movements of goods and people have effectively closed down tourism and international education.

But more is likely to come. The events of the last year have substantially increased the risk factors that all businesses face, and a return to the "old normal" is unlikely.

Many flow-on effects are not yet fully apparent and will need to be managed. Will old patterns of employment continue? Will consumers resume their previous spending patterns once health restrictions are gone? What will be the financial situation be of many businesses once government support measures are removed?

These disasters have also given us the opportunity to consider whether there are other, better ways of operating as a community. The private sector is now the principal source of economic growth, jobs and opportunities in the ACT. With the ACT elections approaching what do we need to change to ensure that it can continue to deliver benefits for all Canberrans?

***One thing is clear: the future is always uncertain, and we need to ensure that we are best placed to deal with whatever challenges may come to pass.***

<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020) *Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries and Exits, June 2015 to June 2019* Cat.no. 8165.0, Table 4.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020) *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, Quarterly, August 2019* Cat.no. 6291.0.55.003, Table 26a.

# What sort of economy does the Canberra region need?

The Canberra Business Chamber has been engaging widely with the business and not-for-profit sectors about the policies needed to grow our city and region, ensuring our ongoing prosperity.

We've sought to identify the major issues that businesses have experienced in recent months, understand the problems they are still facing, and determine future courses of action to help them grow and make Canberra economically successful.

The Canberra Business Chamber, other industry associations and local businesses have a clear set of overarching goals.



## 1. A full employment society:

Jobs should be available to all those who seek them, and only the private sector can meet this demand. Employment opportunities are an important tool in providing individuals with income, the opportunity to contribute to the broader community, and a sense of purpose. However, these new jobs need to come from the private sector – in the ACT context, this will mean both businesses and not-for-profit enterprises. Governments are now heavily indebted and cannot afford to take on this role.



## 2. An entrepreneurial culture:

At the heart of any effective economy are our entrepreneurs – the individuals willing to risk their efforts, ideas and investments in creating new opportunities for our community. Our entrepreneurs can be found in both the for-profit and not-for-profit sector, and we need to strongly support them, remove unnecessary barriers to success, and encourage others to take up the challenge. As a community, we also need to be willing to take risks, embrace change, and celebrate both success and failure.



## 3. A resilient community:

There will always be challenges and shocks to the local economy. Whilst we cannot always predict and plan for these, we can ensure that we are best placed to deal with them by having a diversified economic base, strong local businesses, flexibility and simplicity in our regulatory processes, and a deep pool of enterprising business operators.



## 4. A diversified economic base:

A strong, resilient and effective economy does not place too many eggs in one basket. Instead, it fosters and encourages as many different businesses as our local entrepreneurs are willing to operate. Traditionally the ACT's core economic sectors have included government, IT, education, property and services. These must continue to be encouraged, but the wider the range of goods and services we provide, the greater our capacity to withstand economic setbacks and to grow our economy. We need to continue to diversify away from over-reliance on government as a major source of employment and work. Similarly, governments should refrain from "picking winners", but rather ensure that all businesses have the chance to succeed on their own merits.



## 5. A tripartite economy:

Jobs, income and opportunities are not driven solely by government. More than most other states and territories, Canberra has historically been seen as a "government town," but this is no longer the case. We need to recognise that all three components of our economy – private enterprises, the government sector, and our not-for-profits (third sector) – are important. Governments need to support both the private and NFP sectors.

# 20 next steps for the ACT

**Based on our members' input and discussions with the broader business community, the following areas should be addressed by the next ACT Government.**



## Priority area 1: Driving economic recovery, growth and diversity.

### COVID transition

The ACT is transitioning out of the COVID-prevention measures imposed earlier this year, and there is a risk that further restrictions may apply in future. However, the business community needs support to survive and grow in this new era. A clear sense of direction is needed. Information to the business community from government needs to be consistent, timely and easily accessible. And the adoption of new innovations, improved digital trading skills and other competencies must also be a priority.

#### **Recommendation 1:**

*The ACT Government work with local businesses to develop a comprehensive strategy for economic recovery, business activity and development in the transition to the “new normal” of living in a COVID-active trading environment. Planning must actively involve the Canberra Business Chamber and other industry groups.*

### Build a long-term fiscal roadmap

Fiscal discipline is fundamental to the long-term economic prosperity of the Territory. The business community is actively advocating for stimulus through investment, but also is acutely aware that government debt must ultimately be repaid. A clear long-term plan for a return to a balanced ACT budget will support business confidence that the ACT is placed to deal financially with any future external shocks or disasters.

#### **Recommendation 2:**

*The ACT Government establish a clear long-term plan for the effective management of the Territory's public finances.*

### Support new and emerging industries

The future prosperity of the capital region will ultimately depend upon the growth of our existing industries, as well as fostering emerging new industries and business opportunities. These will come from both new entrepreneurial ventures, and from leveraging our natural advantages as the seat of federal

government. For example, many other states already have policies in place to foster the defence industry, the space sector, and national security-related work. This will also help us further diversify our economy and improve our capacity to weather future economic shocks.

**Recommendation 3:**

*The ACT Government actively pursue and support the growth of emergent new industry sectors.*

**Major infrastructure: Building for the future, now**

Private sector investment relies on a well-structured pipeline of projects to provide improved investment certainty, innovation, increased competition, capacity building, market confidence, efficient procurement and delivery. Everything should be “on the table”, including debt funding, Commonwealth investment and innovative approaches to public-private partnerships that incentivise the private sector to invest over the long term.

The Canberra of the future needs major infrastructure assets, and now is the right time to start work on these. Major projects will support the Territory’s construction, tourism, and events industries, provide more jobs, deliver social outcomes, and enhance well-being. Many of these projects were previously endorsed by the ACT Government in its 2019 Infrastructure Plan. Bringing them forward can give an immediate jobs boost for local engineers, architects, builders and subcontractors.

**Recommendation 4:**

*The ACT Government provide a major infrastructure implementation strategy, utilising public-private partnerships alongside territory and commonwealth financing. In addition to existing programs already underway (such as Light Rail Stage 2 and the Canberra Hospital project), the ACT Government should urgently commence planning, design and construction of an upgraded National Convention Centre precinct, Canberra Sports Stadium, and the EPIC redevelopment.*

As well as these projects, investment in much-needed social and affordable housing infrastructure will further support economic recovery, meet an increasing community demand for shelter, and deliver positive social outcomes. A variety of funding tools can also be considered to enable these to proceed.

**Recommendation 5:**

*The ACT Government immediately invest in provision of more social housing.*

**Small scale infrastructure: Investing in local business and communities**

Small infrastructure projects can also provide major long-term benefits and need to be supported alongside larger programs. Businesses in many of Canberra’s local shopping and trading precincts have called for small-scale but critical improvements such as gardening, painting, signage, waste management and pedestrian access. Investment in these improvements can help revitalise these areas, encourage new customers, and boost economic activity. The Chamber supports the “fast track” approval of these initiatives. There has been some progress made towards this end, but more can be done – and local businesses need to be involved in this process.

**Recommendation 6:**

*The ACT Government continue to fund a program of local precinct improvements, with local business group input to planning and delivery.*

This should not be a one-off solution. Local districts will always have a need for continuous improvement of their local amenities (facilities date and consumer preferences change), so the Chamber believes funding of these small-scale infrastructure works should become an ongoing activity funded by government.

**Recommendation 7:**

*The ACT Government continue the current program of small-scale precinct project funding beyond the 2020-21 financial year.*

## Priority area 2:

### Ensure we have the right workforce and skills for the future.

#### Workforce planning

We need a long-term education and skills development plan that produces sufficient skilled workers for the “new normal” of the post-COVID era. As the federal government has recently adopted a new national skills framework, now is the right time to do so. Identifying and addressing future skills demand and shortages is critical to business growth. Growth areas within our economy, and key capability areas (including tourism, ICT, education, and renewable energy), are vulnerable to workforce shortages without future planning. Similarly, the movement of commerce into the online environment means most of our workforce now need better digital skills.

The importance of understanding and planning for future workforce needs cannot be overstated. This must incorporate clear targets for growth across industry sectors, the development of suitable educational and training facilities within the ACT, and strategies to attract skilled migrants to meet these. The levers available to increase skills, participation and workforce numbers must be appropriately resourced.

#### **Recommendation 8:**

*The ACT Government resource and work with the business community to develop a workforce plan and skills strategy for the ACT and surrounding capital region.*

#### Population planning

Skills development and business conditions are linked to population trends and growth. What is the optimum population size for Canberra? Should we attempt to proactively map this out, or simply respond to uncontrolled patterns of growth and migration? There currently is no clear indication from government on what is a desirable medium and long-term population level for the ACT. Without this, it is hard to encourage businesses to formulate long term plans, to plan future land-use, and to develop appropriate civic amenities.

#### **Recommendation 9:**

*The ACT Government articulate a clear plan for our desired population levels, aligned with the skills and workforce plan.*





## Priority area 3:

### Make it easier for ACT businesses to startup, grow and compete.

#### Business-friendly government

Cabinet government works best when there is clear division of ministerial responsibilities, and the public and business sector readily know who is responsible for a given function of public administration. The ACT has 8 Ministers, but they administer 36 different ministerial portfolios, and a multitude of overlapping responsibilities. This creates confusion and inefficiency. By our reckoning, there are at least 4 different portfolios, covered by 3 different ministers, that make up the overall business portfolio.

#### **Recommendation 10:**

*Appoint one Minister with clear responsibility for business-related activities and a mandate to advocate for the business community and their concerns. Streamline the number of ministerial portfolios impacting on business to create a specific single business portfolio.*

The temporary role of a Business Commissioner, created to help mediate commercial lease-related issues, has been a useful one. In other states (NSW, Victoria, SA and WA), this position is known as the Small Business Commissioner – a statutory role which last existed in the ACT in 2004-5.

#### **Recommendation 11:**

*The next ACT government should retain the Business Commissioner role and convert it into that of a statutory Small Business Commissioner.*

#### Review and restructure commercial rates

Members and businesses across the ACT consistently advise that the current commercial rates system significantly penalises businesses, for no apparent reason. Commercial properties are often valued at higher-than-market prices, and the top marginal rate for commercial properties is many times higher than the top residential property tax rate. In many cases the higher rates are applied retroactively, creating even larger tax bills. Members report increases of commercial property rates of up to 500%. The negative impacts of commercial rates on both local business owners and on tenants (most of whom are small businesses) are likely to resurface once the current temporary Commonwealth-initiated lease dispute mechanisms are removed.



The current commercial rates regime is a regressive tax on the people and businesses that want to invest in the future prosperity of Canberra. The consequence is reduced investment in commercial properties, and tenants and landlords seeking alternative places to invest or run their business. The attractiveness of renting in Queanbeyan or further afield in the region is becoming a reality for many businesses in the ACT.

#### **Recommendation 12:**

*The ACT Government freeze commercial rates, and review the commercial rates regime, working with business to develop an alternate revenue model.*

#### Secure Local Jobs Code

Our members believe that “support for local business” should start with a focus on public sector purchasing. Compliance work that does not add value creates unnecessary costs, deters, and ultimately limits the ability of smaller-sized businesses and not-for-profits in the ACT to successfully tender for ACT Government work. Ability to participate in many local government tenders is governed by the Secure Local Jobs Code, and there is a need for significant reform of the Code. It creates an extra level of unnecessary regulation. Local industry associations are currently unable to audit members’ compliance with the code. Business organisations and not-for-profits (NFPs), although representing key stakeholders, do not have equitable representation on the Code’s advisory council compared to unions.

#### **Recommendation 13:**

*The ACT Government review the operations of the Secure Local Jobs Code and its impact on small business, ensuring that business organisations have equitable input into its governance and certification processes.*

### Funding for non-profit organisations

Many of the ACT's community-based organisations currently operate on short-term contracts with government. These arrangements are often funded on year-by-year contracts, which creates uncertainty and more risk. Long term funding will allow organisations to undertake more effective planning, invest in delivering better client services, and allow them to provide secure jobs and develop skills.

#### **Recommendation 14:**

*The ACT Government provide multi-year contracts to community organisations when funding the provision of social and community services.*

### Workers' compensation reform

Businesses continue to be concerned that the ACT's current workers' compensation insurance framework is unnecessarily complex and expensive, and that other jurisdictions offer more appropriate schemes. The current cost of premiums is still problematic for many businesses and can act as a barrier to employing more staff.

#### **Recommendation 15:**

*The ACT Government establish a working party drawn from the Chamber, insurance sector, legal community and government to examine the current worker's compensation system and identify what changes should be made to these arrangements.*

### Director liabilities

The ACT continues to introduce new rules imposing sanctions and liabilities on company directors. This is at odds with the spirit and intent of the federal *Corporations Act*, which seeks to provide a uniform legal regime across the country. It also imposes additional unnecessary compliance burdens often on small "mum and dad" businesses, when appropriate remedies already exist in law.

#### **Recommendation 16:**

*The ACT Government refrain from adopting new director liabilities unless there is an agreed Commonwealth-state intention to impose the same in all other jurisdictions. Existing ACT-specific director laws should be repealed in favour of a common, unified national approach.*



## Priority area 4:

### Support small business and encourage entrepreneurship.

#### Cash flow support

Small business in the ACT, while appreciative of the economic based support provided by the ACT Government during the COVID pandemic, have expressed concern that it does not go far enough. In other jurisdictions, notably NSW and Queensland, small businesses have had access to immediate cash flow support in addition to the waivers and deferrals of taxes and charges provided in the ACT. For those small businesses most impacted by the COVID pandemic, cash flow support could mean the difference between recovery or closure.

#### **Recommendation 17:**

*The ACT Government provide one-off cash support grants to small businesses in financial need.*

#### Small business advisory services

After earlier advocacy by the Chamber, the ACT recently funded a small business advisory service (Canberra Business Enterprise Centre) to assist new entrepreneurs, existing firms, and local small firms seeking to grow. Along with the assistance provided to technology-based start-up enterprises at Canberra Innovation Network (CBRIN), continuing this service beyond the initial pilot will be critical to support businesses through the difficult months ahead. We also believe the amount of time CBEC can provide to each local business should be expanded. This will enable the service to support small businesses as they work through new approaches to their business plans, digital capability or financing issues.

#### **Recommendation 18:**

*The ACT Government continue funding to the Canberra Business Enterprise Centre small business advisory program and expand the support provided to individual local businesses.*

#### Innovation support for start-up and mature businesses

All businesses recognise the need to continue adopting innovative work methods and approaches, but need support to fully do so. There are opportunities to capitalise not only on the pivots already undertaken by many small businesses and the rapid acquisition of new digital capabilities, but on the experience of business operators and the resources and assets they have developed over the years. Some of this can be done through the services already provided by CBRIN, but additional support would be best delivered through alternate advisory networks.

#### **Recommendation 19:**

*Continue to fund CBRIN and also actively support mature SMEs seeking to innovate and become more digitally savvy.*

#### Protecting the mental health and well-being of business operators

Local small business owner-operators have now had to deal with many months of unexpected issues that placed major demands on them, whilst simultaneously juggling major financial, customer and employee challenges. Business operators focus on the mental health and well-being of employees, but the stresses for owners have been substantial, are often under-reported, and will increase as the COVID pandemic continues to impact the economy. Business owners need support from government to handle the stresses they are facing. We also need to ensure that entrepreneurs who experience business failure are not discouraged to try again when circumstances are right.

#### **Recommendation 20:**

*The ACT Government resource specialist mental health support for business owners under stress and/or at risk of business failure.*

## Appendix:

# Consulting with the ACT business community

**As the Territory's peak business voice, the Chamber has spent an extensive amount of time in 2020 working with individual businesses, key business associations and local precinct trader groups to understand the current issues facing the sector, and the options for future policy action.**

In June 2020, the Chamber held a series of virtual (online) forums with a wide range of ACT industry, professional and not-for-profit associations. These "kindred organisations," who are themselves also members of the Chamber, represent most of the business and community sector operating in Canberra today.

Four of these events were held, with invitations extended to most associations across the Territory. These were conducted in a focus-group style atmosphere, each with a limited number of participants, and involving a deep discussion of the issues and likely ways forward. This has provided us with a rich, detailed source of feedback and ideas.

In addition, individual Chamber members and the broader business community were also invited to submit any comments, concerns or ideas. Meetings were also held on a regular basis with the existing precinct trading groups that represent firms operating in Mitchell, Hume, Phillip, Fyshwick and other localities.

Our goal was simple: we wanted to identify the major issues that businesses have experienced in recent months, understand the current problems they are still facing, and identify future courses of action to help them grow and to make Canberra economically successful.

The changes and challenges that Canberra firms have had to face during the last financial year have been major: bushfires, smoke hazes, hailstorms, and COVID-19.

These consultations have provided us with a unique opportunity to discuss these issues in detail, and to map out a plan that covers not only the immediate post-COVID environment, but also the long-term prosperity of the ACT.

## Appendix:

# Key issues raised in our member consultations

**Canberra business and not-for-profit groups reported a number of broad themes and common experiences.**

### Government support

**Bushfire assistance:** The current focus on COVID and its impact has meant that many firms in the broader capital region affected by the November-December bushfires and smoke disasters feel they have been overlooked by policy makers. Governments need to be mindful of this. Some NSW-based firms report that bushfire grants money has not yet been dispersed, and no ACT businesses – despite the impact of smoke pollution – have received government assistance. The federal government should move more quickly to address this and issue grants for fire affected businesses.

**JobKeeper:** The federal government's employment support scheme has been seen as very useful and is widely supported by attendees. Whilst not without its shortfalls, it is generally perceived as having provided a useful lifeline to many businesses and their employees. There is growing concern, however, about what will happen when the scheme ends.

**Procurement:** Government campaigns to "support local business" should start with a focus on public sector purchasing. Participants are concerned that both territory/state and federal government procurement may be shifting to prefer the use of larger providers, rather than using smaller, local firms (a case in point being the local printing industry). This is especially so in the community services and not-for-profit sector, and may threaten the viability of many local for-purpose enterprises.

**Worker's compensation insurance:** The current cost of premiums is still problematic for many businesses, and can act as a barrier to employing more staff.

### Clarity of information and decision-making

**Information and advice from government:** Messaging from government has not always been consistent and clear. Many SMEs do not always know where to go for advice and information, and sometimes information is not always easy for small businesses to absorb and understand. As a case in point, several industries (such as the outdoor education and school tourism sector) were still waiting for information on dates when they can re-open for business.

**Cross-border comparisons and competition:** Many businesses continue to be confused by the seemingly-arbitrary differentiation in the application of lockdown and easing rules between NSW and the ACT. COVID aside, many local businesses believe that the ACT does not offer as competitive and business-friendly an environment as NSW. There will also be heated competition for investment between states and territories. If the local trading environment becomes too difficult, businesses will relocate across the border into NSW.

### Social impacts

**Increased demand for social support services and social housing:** Participants expect a greater need for access to social housing through 2020-21 – in fact, NFPs are already seeing increased demand. Participants also expect a pickup in demand for other community/social services as lockdown and movement restrictions end, when people will once more be able to deal with issues that were temporarily suppressed during the lockdown. Mental health is one example. However, NFPs may not have the resources to cope with this new demand level.

**Mental health:** Often unspoken, business owner-operators have now had to deal with several months of unexpected issues that have placed major demands on them, whilst simultaneously juggling major financial, customer and employee challenges. Concern is growing that the stresses imposed by this are now substantial and are often under-reported.

**Childcare:** The abrupt changes to childcare funding arrangements, in which the federal government has cut financial support well before winding down financial support given to the general business community, is a concern. Many NFPs are now worried that government may also suddenly change arrangements for other community organisations.

### Demographics, skills and workforce

**Future employment demand and management:** There is likely to be a surge in job losses when JobKeeper ends, as not all businesses will have sufficient funds to retain all employees. Staff who currently refuse to work because they are on JobKeeper are likely to possibly lose their positions. Moreover, many businesses have now learnt to operate more efficiently, will not need as many staff in future, and so are likely

to undertake employee downsizing. Businesses are concerned that a contracting job market already appears to be emerging, which holds both challenges and opportunities. Whilst it can allow businesses and NFPs to choose from a larger pool of candidates, it also unfortunately indicates fewer employment opportunities in the general population.

**Population:** Concern was expressed that there seems to be no clear indication from government as to what might be a desirable medium and long-term population level for the ACT. Without this, it is hard to encourage businesses to formulate long term plans, to plan future landuse, and to develop appropriate civic amenities.

### **Innovation and entrepreneurship**

**Embracing the digital economy:** An opportunity exists now to capitalise on new digital skills that have, in effect, been forcibly acquired in the workforce. Everyone has had to learn how to better use technology, and firms should be encouraged to utilise these, rather than let them wither. At the same time, it is also recognised that many businesses (especially smaller ones and NFPs) need continued access to training to improve their capacities in this area, in particular managing the increased cyber security risks.

**Regulation and risk-taking:** The temporary suspension of many onerous regulatory requirements has been welcomed, allowing businesses to respond more nimbly and flexibly to the challenges imposed by COVID. However, a return to “compliance as normal” raises concerns. Risk management practices and rules should not damage the entrepreneurial spirit which will be needed to regrow the national and ACT economy. There are concerns amongst company directors about what might happen when the current, short-term “safe harbour” provisions for directors expire later in the year – will directors be more personally exposed to liabilities as a result?

**Innovation:** Businesses recognise the need to continue adopting innovative work methods and approaches, but need support to help fully do so.

### **Future impacts of COVID**

**Business closure:** Not all industries have yet felt the full impact of COVID, as the impact on some businesses can be delayed. Many firms which are currently still operating may be in danger of closing, especially when temporary support measures from government are withdrawn. What will happen when financial support from government cuts out is an ongoing concern for both private and not-for-profit sector businesses. Others face substantial likely losses of income as depressed demand works its way through the supply chain. Some likely impacted groups include accountants, plumbers and sub-contractors working in various construction-related areas.

**Industry associations:** Various peak sectoral bodies have also been hard hit by COVID. Some have already begun to report fewer new members and low renewal rates by existing member firms. This is likely to accelerate in future as member businesses face the loss of government financial support (JobKeeper). In addition, many smaller associations rely on their annual conference for income; cancellations of these have hit them heavily. This is a particularly important issue in the ACT, as many national associations are based in Canberra.

**Tourism and hospitality:** These twin sectors have been some of the hardest hit business segments. Even with the easing of lockdown provisions, restrictions on travel within and outside of Australia have led to decreased demand. Coupled with the earlier smoke and bushfires, this has been a major shock to the sector, and full recovery is expected to take several years.

**Construction and property:** Whilst there is still a current pipeline of projects underway, firms in these sectors are deeply concerned about what happens when these are complete. Local planning development approvals are often cumbersome and lengthy, and residential demand is likely to be depressed by job losses. Social distancing measures and work-from-home measures may also lead to a decline in the commercial property sector.

# Our Key Member Categories

## Principal Members

ActewAGL  
Beca Pty Ltd  
Canberra Airport Pty Ltd  
Canberra FM Radio Pty Ltd  
CanPrint Communications Pty Ltd  
CARE Super Pty Ltd  
Casino Canberra Limited  
Deloitte  
Elite Event Technology  
Employers Mutual Management  
Encore Event Technologies Pty Ltd  
EY - Ernst & Young

GIO - AAI Limited t/as GIO  
Hindmarsh Corporation Pty Ltd  
Hyatt Hotel Canberra  
KPMG  
Lend Lease Building Group Pty Ltd  
Master Builders Association of the ACT  
National Press Club  
PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC)  
Telstra Corporation Limited  
The Village Building Co. Ltd  
TP Dynamics Pty Ltd  
University of New South Wales - Canberra

## Kindred Members

Access Programs Australia Ltd  
ACT Construction Guild  
ACT Law Society  
ACT Playgroups Association  
Australian Chamber of Commerce & Industry  
Australian Chinese Young Entrepreneurs  
Australian College of Nursing  
Australian Hotels Association  
Australian Indigenous Doctors Association  
Australian Institute of Company Directors  
Australian Institute of Quantity Surveyors (ACT Chapter)  
Bosom Buddies ACT  
Campbell Primary School P&C Association  
Canberra Cyber Security Innovation Node  
Canberra Highland Society & Burns Club  
Canberra Region Tourism Leaders Forum  
Canberra Women in Business  
Car Craft NSW  
CBR Innovation Network Ltd  
Communities@Work  
Conflict Resolution Service  
CPA Australia  
Cyber Security Research Centre  
Directions Health Services  
Engineers Australia (Canberra)  
Hands Across Canberra  
Havelock Housing Association

India Australia Association of Canberra  
Marathon Health  
Marymead  
Master Builders Association ACT  
Master Plumbers ACT  
Motor Trades Association ACT  
National Capital Attractions Association  
National Electrical & Communications Association ACT  
Nexus Human Services  
Outdoor Recreation Industry Council  
Palliative Care ACT  
Personnel Group  
Pharmacy Guild of Australia (ACT)  
Property Council of Australia (ACT)  
Queanbeyan Multilingual Centre  
Red Meat Advisory Council  
Regional Development Australia ACT  
Riding for the Disabled ACT Inc  
Royal National Capital Agricultural Society  
Safety Institute of Australia  
Salvation Army  
Solider On  
Canberra Business Enterprise Centre  
Truffle Marketing Cooperative (NSW/ACT)  
Volunteering and Contact ACT  
Wellcare Australia  
YWCA Canberra



## Corporate Members

ACCOR Hotels Canberra  
ANZ Banking Group Limited  
APM Employment Services  
ARUP Pty Ltd  
Aspen Medical Pty Ltd  
Australian National University  
Brumbies Rugby  
Callida Consulting Pty Ltd  
Canberra Convention Bureau Inc  
Canberra Helicopters & Forestrack  
Canberra Institute of Technology  
Canberra Rex Hotel  
Canberra Southern Cross Club Ltd  
Cantlie Recruitment Services Pty Ltd  
Capital Chemist Pty Ltd  
Capital Health Network Limited  
Capital Hotel Group  
Capital Radio (Radio 2CC & Radio 2CA)  
Capitol Chilled Foods Australia Pty Ltd  
CCS Group  
Chartered Accountants Australia New Zealand  
Colliers International (ACT) Pty Ltd  
Colquhoun Murphy Pty Ltd  
Crowne Plaza Canberra  
DFP Recruitment  
Dimeo Cleaning Services (ACT) Pty Ltd  
DPM Conferencing Pty Ltd/The communication link  
Drake International  
Elton Consulting Group Pty Ltd  
Gap Resource Management Services  
GHD Pty Ltd  
Goodwin Aged Care Services Ltd  
Hays Specialist Recruitment (Australia) Pty Ltd  
Independent Property Group  
Institute of Public Accountants  
Kingpin Canberra  
Manteena Commercial Pty Ltd  
McGrath Canberra Pty Ltd  
MedHealth Pty Ltd  
Minter Ellison Lawyers  
Molonglo Financial Services Limited  
MV Management Pty Ltd / Meyer Vandenberg Lawyers  
Nexis Accountants and Business Advisors  
Noetic Solutions Pty Ltd  
ORD Minnett Limited  
Project Coordination (Australia) Pty Ltd  
Project Wing  
Qantas Airways Limited

RiotACT Holdings Pty Ltd  
Rolfe Property Services  
RSL LifeCare Limited  
Seeing Machines Limited  
Service One Mutual Limited  
Shaw Building Group Pty Ltd  
Shaw Vineyard Estate  
Sigma Bravo Pty Ltd  
Snedden Hall & Gallop  
South Canberra Holdings Pty Ltd  
Supabarn Supermarkets Pty Ltd  
Tailored Accounts  
The Canberra Times  
The CAPS Clinic  
TSA Management (ACT) Pty Ltd  
University of Canberra  
VCA Services Pty Ltd  
Vimy Services LLC  
Walker Executive Pty Ltd  
Westpac Banking Corporation  
Wildbear Entertainment  
Windlab Limited  
WR Engineering Pty Ltd  
XTEK LIMITED

*Membership of Canberra Business Chamber does not imply endorsement of the Chamber's policies or positions. Other membership categories not listed include Life/Honorary, Business and Micro.*



**Canberra  
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