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Centre unsure if funding will continue

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WHEN someone seeks help from the police or a hospital after a sexual assault, they will often be supported by the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre, which will attend callouts anytime of the day or night.

The centre also operates a hotline and provides counselling and support for children and adult survivors of sexual violence as they navigate legal and medical systems. Demand for the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre is only growing but current funding will end on its 50th anniversary next year.

While a 2024 review into police responses to sexual assault recommended the government fund the rape crisis centre as a priority, the organisation will not know what money it has for the next financial year until an unknown date in June.

The centre is almost solely reliant on the ACT government to survive, chief executive officer Tiffany Karlsson

said. It joins other organisations calling for longer-term funding contracts and better notice of budgetary decisions.

Dozens of community sector leaders watched proceedings in the ACT Legislative Assembly on Wednesday.

Ms Karlsson said crisis services struggle to plan year-to-year because of short funding cycles.

"Five-year funding cycles would give us the certainty to do what we need to do to support the community and would also give us support to attract and retain staff members. Currently, we can't compete with the different types of employment on offer," she said.

Not-for-profits are increasingly concerned they will lose funding in the 2025-26 budget, as the ACT government battles a deepening deficit.

ACT Council of Social Services chief executive Devin

Bowles said the community sector is at crisis point.

"The community sector is essential infrastructure, and its sustainability must be a priority. Failure to invest now will be a decision the government regrets a decade from now," he said. "For too long, the sector has been underfunded, forcing organisations to operate with insufficient staffing levels, inadequate facilities, and growing waitlists."

The Canberra Rape Crisis Centre has been forced to triage clients, Ms Karlsson said. "We aren't currently funded enough to meet the demand for people seeking our crisis services or our counselling services, and we'd like to do a lot more in terms of preventative education," she said.

Canberra Liberals MLA Chiaka Barry said community organisations were facing delays in grant funding.

Ms Barry introduced a motion to the Legislative

Assembly calling for more certainty for community organisations. Canberra Liberals MLA Elizabeth Lee said organisations are "left in the dark and have no idea whether they'll receive continued funding; sometimes within weeks of their funding running out".

The 2025-26 budget consultation process is under way.

Community Services Minister Suzanne Orr said the government was "in the middle of the budget process that's giving consideration to a wide range of views".

"The balancing and consideration of all the requests extends widely and is quite large and complicated," she said.

"I acknowledge that future funding sources that are reliant on upcoming budget decisions can involve a period of waiting and uncertainty.