



15 JAN, 2026

## ACT Greens: Plans for 2026

Canberra Weekly, Canberra



Page 1 of 3

# ACT Greens: Plans for 2026

by **NICHOLAS FULLER**

Inequality, housing, health, environment and climate will be key priorities for the ACT Greens this year, party leader Shane Rattenbury MLA says, warning that many residents of this outwardly prosperous city are being left behind.

“Over the last 12 months, lots of things have not changed,” Mr Rattenbury said. “It’s still really hard for people to get a free visit to a doctor in Canberra; housing remains largely unaffordable; and we’ve seen real lack of action on climate change from the government.

“The big one affecting our community is growing inequality. The gap between those who are doing well and those who are really struggling just continues to grow. That inequality is symptomatic at those other points, whether it’s the doctor, housing, or cost of groceries.

“Inequality grew in 2025, and for us, it’s going to be a significant focus in 2026: really thinking about how we ensure economic justice for Canberrans and making sure that everyone in this city is doing OK — not just those that are in a fortunate position.

“Plenty of Canberrans are doing quite well, and that’s great, but in a city like this, it’s very easy for those who are struggling to be forgotten about.”

### Community sector under pressure

Some of the inequality the ACT faces is driven by federal policy settings, such as negative gearing and capital gains tax, which cannot be changed at territory level, Mr Rattenbury said.

But local drivers matter too. The community sector provides free

meals, material aid, and mental health, employment, and housing support for those struggling in this city — but funding has not kept up with population growth, according to ACTCOSS data.

“Where those organisations are struggling to deliver means the community is missing out,” Mr Rattenbury said.

“Many organisations have received annual inflation-based funding increases, but over 15 or 20 years Canberra’s population has grown significantly. When you’re only keeping up with inflation, you’re actually going backwards. Why don’t you add the demand growth on top of that? We haven’t seen a reasonable adjustment for the community sector. That is a factor driving inequality in the ACT...

“We cannot afford to lose people that do those roles. They lift up others in the community, because they’re passionate, but they also deserve to have a decent work balance, and not be absolutely ground into the dirt because they’re committed.

“We owe gratitude as a community, but we can’t take advantage of that goodwill. People who work in the community sector — whether it’s domestic, family violence, crisis services, housing services, food relief — we can’t thank them enough, and yet we’re taking advantage of their goodwill as a system.”

### Housing waiting list rises

The public housing waiting list increased by 14 per cent in seven months — from 3,000 to 3,500 applicants — reflecting both rising demand and insufficient supply, Mr Rattenbury said.

“People are going on the waiting list because they desperately need it,” Mr Rattenbury said. “In my and the

Greens’ view, it’s a fundamental role for government to make sure people don’t fall through the cracks. The ACT Government needs to think very carefully about what it can do.”

Mr Rattenbury said housing policy this year must consider planning and zoning for the ‘missing middle’ reforms, “unlocking more opportunities for people to live close to where they work, where the shops are, where the schools are, rather than just continuing to push the city out. Getting that zoning reform right is going to be incredibly important, essentially creating more housing availability.”

The Greens want to see a range of choices — apartments, terrace houses, townhouses — while retaining the green spaces, trees, and birds that define Canberra.

### Health and bulk billing

ACT bulk billing rates remain among the nation’s lowest, meaning that people are not getting the health care they need early, and instead end up in the most expensive part of the system: the emergency department and the hospital.

Mr Rattenbury believes the health system must be overhauled, and the government must rethink its approach to primary care to reduce pressure on hospitals and rein in rising costs.

“We have to tackle the health system. It’s incredibly expensive — and it’s been the driver of budget pressure.”

While the federal government has promised investments to bulk billing incentives, Mr Rattenbury said the data showed no significant turnaround in Canberra. He criticised ACT health minister Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA for declining a Green proposal to trial government-run clinics where visiting doctors bulk bill patients on-site — a model adopted



15 JAN, 2026

## ACT Greens: Plans for 2026

Canberra Weekly, Canberra



Page 2 of 3

by both major parties in the recent Tasmanian election.

[continued on page 16]

[continued from page 15]

“We still think there are good ideas on the table that could lift the bulk billing rates now,” Mr Rattenbury said. “It’s fundamental to reining in the health budget; giving more people access to the health care they need early in their pathway, or [regular treatment] for chronic conditions, so they don’t find themselves suddenly in the emergency department.”

Mr Rattenbury also called for a fresh review of the ACT’s nurse-led walk-in centres, which have not been reassessed in more than a decade. While the Greens support their continued operation, they believe the new federal urgent care clinics — which combine nurses and GPs — should prompt a rethink of local models.

### Climate action/environment

Mr Rattenbury accused the ACT Government of letting environmental policy drift, warning that Canberra’s climate and biodiversity goals are slipping backwards due to inaction and short-sighted decisions.

“We need to see Labor come out of their malaise on climate action,” Mr Rattenbury said. “The environment is going backwards under this government.”

He said Labor entered the 2024 election with only minimal climate commitments, such as maintaining the Sustainable Household Scheme. However, the once interest-free scheme now includes interest charges. “They haven’t even stuck to their own commitments.”

Likewise, the ACT’s Climate Change Strategy expired at the end of 2025, and has not been updated, despite the government having

more than a year to prepare, Mr Rattenbury said.

Environmental protection has also suffered, Mr Rattenbury warned: the government has not invested in the Healthy Waterways program that cleans up lakes and waterways and maintain the ecological benefits of wetlands, nor in weed control.

A proposed road at Canberra Airport that threatens the critically endangered Canberra Grassland Earless Dragon is “incredibly frustrating”, Mr Rattenbury said.

“We’ve got a critically endangered species, and we’re now building a road in their habitat. It just makes no sense. It just speaks to a system that grinds on like it’s always done in the middle of an ecological crisis. The federal government have a goal of no more extinctions in Australia, and yet they’re approving projects like this for species on the edge of extinction.”

Mr Rattenbury said the Greens would push for stronger action in 2026, particularly through reviewing environmental legislation. He pointed to the government’s commitment, secured by the Greens, to set an urban growth boundary, and said the Greens will push for greater protection for native wildlife habitat, and to maintain nature corridors and waterways in suburbs.

“These local ecosystems at our reserves and parks across the city aren’t all protected, so as part of the Nature Conservation Act review later this year this will be a key focus for the ACT Greens. The Greens believe we can build enough housing across Canberra without paving over habitat and ecologically important areas within our city’s footprint.”

### Indigenous disadvantage

Mr Rattenbury believes the ACT must do more to tackle Indigenous disadvantage, especially in justice

and early childhood.

“The overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the justice system is a national travesty, and the ACT is not immune,” Mr Rattenbury said.

He pointed to the Jumbunna Review into First Nations Over-Representation, which he commissioned in the previous term as Attorney-General, as offering practical reform, but said too many successful programs lack follow-through. Justice reinvestment programs like Yedding Mura and the Bush Healing Farm are underutilised or do not receive continuing funding after the pilot.

“There are good solutions out there, but they are not being followed through as effectively as they might be,” Mr Rattenbury said.

He also highlighted “very concerning” Early Childhood Development Census results for Indigenous children.

“So many people end up involved in the justice system because of poverty.”

### Budget repair without austerity

The Greens and the Canberra Liberals are working to review the ACT’s fiscal position — Greens deputy leader Jo Clay MLA is chairing the committee. It will, Mr Rattenbury said, be “an important forum to think about how we start to repair the budget”. The committee will build a common understanding of the problem and what solutions look like — but, based on Tasmania’s experience addressing its fiscal problems, he expects it will take a decade.

Mr Rattenbury insists that repairing the budget must not come at the expense of the most needy in the community.

“An austerity drive is often the classic way: ‘We’ll fix the budget;



15 JAN, 2026

## ACT Greens: Plans for 2026



Canberra Weekly, Canberra



Page 3 of 3

we're just going to cut all these things.' We can't do that either, because that will widen inequality. It's about tax settings, making sure we're spending our money in priority places.

"This year the government didn't really tackle the budget situation, but the couple of changes they did make totally got it wrong when it came to issues of inequality. They cut the Rent Relief Fund — \$1.7 million in the scheme of a \$9 billion ACT Budget, a program that kept hundreds of households out of homelessness by maintaining their tenancies. An \$11 charge on working with vulnerable people cards — the volunteers out there are so often the glue that holds the community together. We saw these really poorly targeted budget repair measures that actually would have made the situation frankly worse. They just were not smart solutions."

Mr Rattenbury, however, was pleased that the Greens already had a proposal to tax large corporations, raising more revenue than the health levy would bring in.

"If you're Qantas or banks, this is a very profitable market to operate in; our view was that they should make a greater contribution."

### Conclusion

"We're not here to be an opposition party," Mr Rattenbury said. "We're here to be a party of both ideas and accountability, and that means sometimes working with the government and other times working with others to pressure the government or the government to account. And we've endeavoured to take each issue and think about the best strategy to get an outcome for the community.

"Not only do we pick up individual issues, but we also have the bigger

picture of systemic change and wanting to create a different future — as opposed to picking up the issue of today and dealing with it, we've got a well-articulated vision of a different style of government, of democracy, of how to tackle issues like climate and economic change."



ACT Greens leader Shane Rattenbury MLA. Photo: Kerrie Brewer