Arcadia House consultation

Meeting with Koala Playschool families

Tuesday 30 June 2026

Koala Playschool

Session overview

- Approximately 24 community members attended the session.
- The session provided an opportunity for Koala Playschool families and community members to discuss the proposed relocation of Arcadia House, a residential alcohol and other drug rehabilitation service, to a potential site within the Cook community precinct.
- Infrastructure Canberra representatives and Arcadia House representatives attended to answer questions and hear community feedback.
- Attendees were advised that no decision had been made and that all feedback would be considered before recommendations are provided to the Minister.

Overall community sentiment

- The discussion was respectful, thoughtful and highly engaged. Attendees showed support for rehabilitation services and demonstrated empathy towards people accessing treatment. However, the overwhelming feedback centred on concerns about locating the facility immediately adjacent to Koala Playschool and within the core Cook community hub. Attendees repeatedly emphasised the importance of protecting children's spaces, preserving community green space and ensuring that alternative sites are thoroughly explored before any decision is made.

Key themes heard during the session

Broad support for rehabilitation services

- Attendees consistently acknowledged the importance of alcohol and drug rehabilitation services and recognised the value of Arcadia House's work supporting people in recovery. Attendees generally expressed support for the service itself and appreciation for the challenges involved in finding a suitable location.
- Many attendees carefully distinguished between support for Arcadia House as a service and concerns about the proposed location near children's facilities.

Concerns about compatibility with Koala Playschool

- The dominant theme throughout the session was concern about the compatibility of a residential rehabilitation facility immediately adjacent to a playschool and children's community spaces.
- Attendees raised concerns regarding:
    - Children's physical and psychological safety.

    - Potential exposure to distressed behaviours, raised voices or conflict.
    - The proximity of vulnerable children to a service supporting people in recovery.
    - The responsibility of staff and volunteers to maintain a safe environment for children.
- Arcadia representatives explained that the service is highly structured, accredited, voluntary and has very few incidents, however, parents remained concerned that even a single incident could have a significant impact on young children.

Concerns about community perception and stigma

- A significant discussion centred on community perceptions. Attendees acknowledged that many concerns were linked to public perceptions. However, attendees noted that perceptions can still influence behaviours and decisions, particularly where children are involved.
- Several attendees described feeling conflicted:
    - Wanting to support people in recovery.
    - Recognising the stigma attached to addiction.
    - Simultaneously feeling responsible for protecting spaces used by children and families.
- Some attendees noted that community divisions had emerged during the broader consultation process, with debate sometimes becoming polarised between supporters and opponents of the proposal.

Potential impact on Koala Playschool

- Both families and staff expressed concern that the proposal could affect the future viability of Koala Playschool.
- Concerns included:
    - Prospective families choosing alternative services.
    - Reduced enrolments due to perceptions about the neighbouring facility.
    - Loss of community confidence.
    - Impacts on the unique community culture that has developed over more than 30 years.
- Several attendees emphasised that Koala Playschool is more than an education service and serves as an important community connection point for families across generations.

Importance of the Cook Community Hub

- Attendees repeatedly described the precinct as a highly valued community hub. The area was identified as providing:
    - Significant green space.
    - A playground and recreational facilities.
    - Community gathering spaces.
    - Access to shops and services.
    - Connections between families, sporting groups and local organisations.
- There was concern that development on Site A would reduce openness, change the character of the precinct and diminish the role that the area plays in supporting community wellbeing and social connectedness.

Future community needs and long-term planning

- A number of attendees questioned whether the site should be preserved for future school or community infrastructure needs. Points raised included:
    - Growth in surrounding suburbs.

    - Increasing numbers of young families moving into established areas.
    - Capacity pressures already evident in nearby schools.
    - The importance of retaining flexibility for future community uses.
- Attendees expressed concern that development of a permanent health facility could limit future options for the site.

Alternative locations and site selection

- There was strong interest in understanding how sites had been selected and whether other options remained available. Community members suggested and discussed:
    - Site B rather than Site A – noting neither was preferable.
    - Newer suburbs such as Whitlam.
    - Government-owned sites elsewhere in North Canberra.
    - Hospital and university-adjacent land.
    - Recently announced government land sales.

Questions about consultation and decision-making

- Several community members raised concerns about the consultation process itself. Topics included:
    - Whether consultation occurred early enough.
    - Concerns that concept designs appeared to be prepared before community engagement.
    - Requests for more collaborative planning processes.
    - Questions regarding how the final decision would be made and by whom.
- Attendees expressed a desire for more transparent and community-led planning for the future of the precinct.

Design, traffic and operational considerations

- Attendees raised a range of practical questions regarding:
    - Car parking.
    - Traffic movements.
    - Pedestrian safety.
    - Construction impacts.
    - Noise.
    - Visibility across open spaces.
    - Potential buffers between facilities.
- Several attendees discussed potential mitigation measures should the project proceed. Suggestions included creating a landscaped buffer or activation zone between the proposed facility and existing community spaces, with one attendee proposing a new playground or enhanced community recreation area between the development and Koala Playschool. Attendees also emphasised the importance of maintaining safe connections between the playground, oval and shops, and questioned whether the siting of the proposed facility could be adjusted to better preserve these community links.