

Arcadia House consultation

Drop-in session

Thursday 11 June 2026

Cook Community Hall

Session overview

- Approximately 60 community members attended the session.
 - The primary demographic was senior community members, with a smaller representation of young families.

Overall community sentiment

- Feedback indicated a strong level of opposition to the proposed relocation of Arcadia House to Cook.
- Only 2 attendees expressed support for either of the proposed location options.
- The general sentiment across attendees was that the service should not be relocated to the Cook community.
- Overall, there was a low level of trust within the community, with many attendees questioning whether decisions had already been made and whether the engagement process provided a genuine opportunity to influence or change the proposed locations.

Perceptions of consultation and communication

- Several attendees expressed frustration with how the proposal has been communicated to the community.
- There is a perception among some attendees that the proposed location has already been confirmed prior to broader community engagement.
- Feedback indicated that some attendees feel:
 - Community input has had limited influence on decision making outcomes
 - The rationale for selecting the proposed sites has not been fully understood
 - Information regarding alternative site options has not been widely visible
- Many attendees advised that notification activities (e.g. letterbox drops delivered via a third party provider) were not consistently received or were seen as providing limited notice.
- Many attendees praised local advocacy and social media efforts for raising awareness of the engagement, noting that some attendees would not have been aware of it otherwise.
- .

- It was suggested that flyer distribution be expanded to include surrounding suburbs, such as Aranda, Macquarie and Weetangera or alternatively be based on a defined radius from the proposed site rather than being limited to Cook residents, to improve awareness and reach.

Perceptions of the service (Arcadia House)

- There was a general understanding among attendees that this is an important and valuable community health service, with some concerns about the service itself; however, the stronger and more consistent concerns related to its proposed location.
- While information was provided about the service's education and support focus, some attendees expressed scepticism about this description.
 - There was an inconsistent understanding of the service model, with some attendees associating alcohol and other drug services with increased crime, anti-social behaviour and reduced community safety. These perceptions appear to have influenced views on the appropriateness of locating the service within a residential community.
- Some attendees provided both personal or second hand experiences with similar services.
- A number of attendees raised concerns about:
 - Perceived links to anti-social behaviour and local safety impacts
 - The types of clients accessing the service
 - Reports of historical or potential scenarios where individuals may attempt to access the service via door knocking, be turned away, and remain in the surrounding area, contributing to concerns about loitering
- Some attendees felt that this is a high-dependency health service and expressed the view that it would be more appropriately located within a hospital setting.
- Many attendees expressed the view that this should continue to be provided from the North Canberra Hospital site in Bruce, or that further consideration should be given to relocating it to the University of Canberra Hospital campus.

Local context and community impacts

- Both proposed locations were described as highly valued and well used community spaces.
- Significant concern was raised about the potential loss of green space, with many attendees expressing a strong preference for the facility to be located within an existing built up or neighbourhood setting rather than on open or community green space.
- Attendees noted that these areas form a central part of Cook's community hub, supporting both recreation and social connection. Examples included their use for recreational activities, children's birthday parties, off-leash dog exercise, family gatherings, and both formal and informal children's sport and training.
- A number of attendees highlighted the link between access to green space and overall wellbeing, with many questioning how the loss of open space aligns with the Government's wellbeing goals and indicators.
- A number of attendees highlighted that Cook is already a densely populated suburb, with a high proportion of dual occupancy and townhouse developments, reinforcing the importance of preserving the remaining green space.
 - Some attendees referenced existing concerns about anti-social activity in and around the oval, including reports of suspected drug related activity occurring at its edges, which contributed to broader unease about additional perceived impacts.

- It was also noted that some community members continue to feel a sense of loss following the closure of the local school and that this experience has shaped an emotional response to further proposed changes within the suburb.
- Key concerns raised include:
 - Loss or reduced access to community spaces
 - Compatibility with existing uses, including families, children and community activities
 - Perceived impacts on safety and amenity

Property and economic concerns

- Many attendees expressed concern about potential impacts on property values, particularly for homes in close proximity to the proposed sites.
- It was noted that:
 - There is a strong local narrative that property values may decrease
 - Some local real estate agents have undertaken letterbox communications reinforcing this perception

Environmental considerations

- Questions were raised regarding:
 - The protection and management of existing trees
 - Processes required for removal or relocation, including associated costs
- Some attendees referred to previous commitments made during the Ruby House project about relocating green space. They feel these commitments were not followed through, which has affected their level of trust.

Concerns were raised regarding potential tree removal and environmental impacts. Some attendees expressed a perception that environmental and tree protection standards applied within the community may not be consistently reflected in government led developments.

Community wellbeing

- A number of attendees described experiencing heightened stress and anxiety in relation to the proposal and its potential impacts.
- There is a perception that there have been limited opportunities for meaningful engagement, contributing to concern within the community.

Safety perceptions and community wellbeing

- A prominent theme throughout the session was concern about perceived impacts on safety within the community.
- Many attendees expressed apprehension about how the presence of the service may affect the sense of safety for local residents, particularly in frequently used public spaces.
- These concerns were often framed in the context of the existing community profile, with attendees noting:
 - A high presence of young families, including parents with babies and young children
 - Regular use of local spaces by children and young people participating in activities such as dance and other organised programs
 - A significant number of older residents, including elderly women, who regularly access these areas

- Some attendees indicated that their perceptions of alcohol and other drug services contributed to concerns about potential exposure to anti social behaviour or unfamiliar environments, particularly for more vulnerable community members.
- Overall, these perceptions have contributed to heightened sensitivity regarding the appropriateness of locating the service in close proximity to well used, family oriented and recreational spaces and have influenced broader concerns about community safety and wellbeing.
- Many attendees expressed a strong interest in hearing from ACT Police and sought reassurance about how the area would be appropriately monitored and patrolled.
- A few attendees expressed concerns that the service could increase the presence of drugs within the local community, with many noting that there are already issues with suspected drug-related activity occurring on some of the proposed sites, particularly during the evenings.

Site specific feedback

- Many attendees noted that both sites are regularly used by the community, particularly on weekends when Little Athletics activities take place on the oval. As access to the oval is restricted during these times, surrounding areas become important meeting points, dog-walking spaces, and informal play areas for families to gather.
- Attendees raised concerns about the suitability of the sites, particularly noting the proximity of alcohol retail outlets at the local Cook shops.

Option A

- Not considered suitable by many attendees due to:
 - Proximity to a well used playground
 - Location within a key pedestrian corridor connecting residents to the oval
 - Nearby preschool and family oriented activities
 - High levels of recreational use, including barbecues and children's activities
- Overall, attendees felt the site is incompatible with the proposed use due to its role as a family focused space.

Option B

- Also not supported due to:
 - Being a highly utilised sporting area, particularly for little athletics and community sport
- Concerns focused on the loss or disruption of existing recreational use.
- Attendees noted that an ACT Government sign has been in place at the Option B site for several years stating the area is designated green space and not intended for development, which has raised concerns about the appropriateness of the proposal for this location.

Requests for further information and engagement

- There was a strong desire for additional engagement opportunities, with several attendees requesting a town hall style session that includes a formal presentation and more detailed information about the service, its operation and the evidence supporting its impacts.
- There was a strong desire for additional engagement opportunities, with several attendees requesting a town hall style session that includes a formal presentation and more detailed information about the service, including the planning background on how the Cook locations were identified, the protections and safeguards in place for the community and the expected project timeline (e.g. presented visually).

- Many attendees expressed interest in understanding what alternative sites, beyond Cook, were considered and the reasons these options were not pursued in favour of the Cook sites.
- A number of attendees referred to a recently closed tender for a design consultant for the project. While some community members had been able to access copies of the tender documents, many had not, and there was a clear request for these materials to be made publicly available via the YourSay website.
- Attendees also expressed a clear request for more detailed information about the rationale for relocating the service, particularly why a residential, community based setting has been proposed.
- This was identified as a key information gap, with attendees indicating that greater clarity in this area would support improved understanding of the proposal and its intended outcomes.
- Some attendees requested additional detail on the overall footprint of the facility, including its size in square metres, and asked for comparisons with the scale and layout of Emma Ruby House to better understand its potential impact.
- Concerns were raised regarding the inclusivity of engagement activities, with a preference expressed for a broader range of participation options, including door knocking, a dedicated phone line, and opportunities to provide feedback via paper based submissions.

Accessibility issues

- Concerns were raised about accessibility for service users, with attendees noting limited public transport options (including a single bus route) and a lack of nearby health services, such as a local GP, which may impact the suitability of the location.
 - It was also noted that the existing bus route passes a major local club with gambling (Southern Cross), which some attendees identified as an additional consideration in relation to service user pathways and environment.
- Concerns were raised that public transport options to and from Cook are limited, which could create significant barriers for people seeking to access the service who do not drive or live nearby.