

**Opening Statement to the  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND COMMUNITY WELLBEING  
Annual Report Hearings 2022-23**

**by Rebecca Vassarotti MLA,  
Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services**

NOVEMBER 2023

- The ACT Government recognises access to safe, affordable, and appropriate long-term housing improves individual and community outcomes, cohesiveness and wellbeing. This is one of the pillars of our Wellbeing Strategy.
- In 2022-23, our efforts continued to focus on improving housing for low income and disadvantaged individuals and families within our community.
- Provision of social housing assistance is a critical part of the overall housing response to support individuals and families in need. This, along with affordable housing options, rental relief and cost of living supports, aim to ease the housing burden.
- The ACT Government continued to support low-income households in most need through the rental rebate.
  - 93 per cent of public housing tenants were in receipt of a rental rebate, meaning they paid no more than 25 per cent of their income as rent.

- This amounts to a rental subsidy of approximately \$141 million over the financial year.
- We saw an increase in the number of applications for social housing assistance.
  - 930 applications were received for social housing assistance, an increase from 704 in 2021-22.
    - 414 new tenancies were offered, housing 897 people compared to 244 new tenancies housing 429 people in 2021-22, with 99 per cent of people offered housing assistance being greatest in need. Meeting our annual target.
- To support our tenants, a total of 10,405 visits were undertaken during 2022–23, achieving 95.6 per cent of the annual target. This is slightly lower than the annual target due to the ongoing impact of COVID-19 in accessing properties.
- These visits are important as they provide an opportunity for tenants to meet with their Housing Manager face to face and provide information on additional support which can be provided including access to information and support for family safety matters, financial or legal advice, counselling and support services and parenting services.
- Improving tenant experience accessing and living in public housing has been a strong focus.
  - The Connecting Communities Strategy was piloted across 5 multi-unit complexes. Early indicators from the pilot show the targeted engagement approach has increased access to services where required, increased tenant participation in community initiated events and created opportunities for tenants to identify issues of

importance and have them acknowledged and addressed in a timely manner. This work has provided valuable data which will allow our work in multi-unit properties to evolve and improve the communities which we serve. Improvements in this area will continue over coming years.

- A new online Housing Assistance eligibility checker was introduced in late 2022 to support people accessing services online. There were approximately 120 online visits each month. Of those, 66 per cent accessed the checker on their mobile phone, reflecting the increased usability of this service.
  - The Tenant Participation Grants program provided \$65,538 worth of grants over the financial year to 211 individuals across 121 households in both public and community housing to support involvement in the community and connect with others.
- To measure tenants' experience, a Client Experience Measurement Survey was undertaken to understand the client experience for applicants for social housing assistance and the experience of existing public housing tenants. Of the 2,202 responses received, 71 per cent of respondents rated Housing ACT service delivery as very good or excellent.
- We are using the outcomes of this survey to continue to improve tenant experience.
- In 2022-23, the ACT Government continued to provide specialist homelessness funding to assist people who are homeless, or who are at risk of becoming homeless, in the ACT.

- The 2022–23 ACT Budget announced \$2.216 million in funding over 2 years, to continue specialist homelessness programs that commenced operation during the COVID–19 pandemic.
- This was in addition to the ongoing base funding for the homelessness sector. Initiatives funded included:
  - Onelink Client Support Fund – which provided 159 individuals and families with hotel accommodation. Overall, OneLink supported 174 individuals and families with 146 accompanying children over the financial year.
    - Additional funding of \$2.6 million was provided in late 2022 to meet increased demand.
  - Ainslie Lodge – a 18-bed facility that assisted 162 individuals during the financial year.
  - Street to Home Program –accommodated 63 men during the financial year, providing support to stabilise and empower them to access long term accommodation.
  - Early Morning Centre – provided access to meals on average to 70–80 individuals each weekday, and to 30-40 individuals for weekend services.
  - Karinya Housing - supported women who are pregnant or parenting by providing specialist support and accommodation services with 180 women supported through case work , and of these, 23 individual women and their 29 children or babies were provided with safe accommodation. This equated to 7,759 nights of providing women and their children somewhere safe to sleep.

- YWCA's Next-Door Service – assisted 70 older women with comprehensive person-centred wrap around support, with 44 women exiting into longer term secure housing options.
- In addition, the ACT Government allocated funding of over \$1.4 million to six (6) specialist homelessness programs specifically supporting ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. These programs include transitional accommodation for families at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness as well as services providing information, advice, advocacy and support about housing related issues.
- The Rough Sleeper Working Group also continued to support rough sleepers utilising specialist engagement and coordination, including wrap around support and intensive case management. Over 50 rough sleepers were accommodated in hotel accommodation with assistance provided to support transition into longer term accommodation.
- In 2022–23, the ACT Government continued work closely with the homelessness sector to examine the current needs and gaps, and the potential service delivery and system improvements needed in the Commissioning process to ensure sustainability of the sector into the future.
- A series of engagement activities was undertaken with the homelessness sector, cross sector partners and those with a lived experience, culminating in a Strategic Investment Plan for the Homelessness Sector. The Plan was released in October 2022 and supported the investment phase of Commissioning.
- The first round of grants/tenders were released to the sector in November 2022 to commence services from 1 July 2023.

- Engagement with the homelessness sector has continues with a co-design process to support improvements to the service model for clients including those with high and complex needs. The process commenced in early June 2023 and will be support to inform investment in 2023-24.
- These initiatives continue to strengthen and expand the capacity of the specialist homelessness sector, as outlined in the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement of the 10th Legislative Assembly.

**End.**