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**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

***ACT Government response to the Assembly resolution on
Language challenges facing Canberra's Multicultural
community***

TABLING STATEMENT

**Presented by
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Madam Speaker, today we are tabling the ACT Government response to the Assembly's Resolution in August of last year on language challenges facing Canberra's multicultural community.

The ACT Government is committed to ensuring Canberra continues to be a proudly welcoming and multicultural city, where everybody can access government services, and programs, and fully participate in civic life.

According to the 2021 census, 28.7% people living in Canberra were born overseas and a similar percentage speak a language other than English at home.

We know some people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds experience difficulties in accessing grants and appropriate support due to limited or lack of English language skills, institutional and social barriers, and lack of familiarity with government processes and systems.

The ways in which government is currently addressing these issues is outlined in the response to each part of the resolution that I am tabling, but I will summarise some of them now.

Independent review of ACT community language schools

Parts 3(a) (i), (ii) and (iii) of the Resolution called on the ACT Government to table the Independent Review of Investment in ACT Community Language Schools Report and the ACT Government response.

The report and ACT Government response were tabled in the ACT Legislative Assembly on 2 December 2021 and work to progress the recommendations is continuing.

The Community Services Directorate, the ACT Community Language Schools Association, Education Directorate, CIT and Libraries ACT are working together to develop a new funding model, explore ongoing access to venues and establish professional development support for community language schoolteachers.

Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to share today that the 2022-23 ACT Budget has committed an additional \$513,000 over 4 years to support our ACT community language schools. This means in 2022-23, we will start work on a new model of funding for a community language schools that will include a Community Language School Grant Fund; a Teacher Professional Development Program; and a New School and Teaching Resources Development Fund.

National Settlement Outcomes Standards

Part 3(b) of the Resolution is to ensure that the ACT, via both government and community services, meets National Settlement Outcomes Standards published by the Settlement Council of Australia.

The Terms of Reference for the national Senior Officials Settlement Outcomes Group, of which the ACT is a member, reflects the National Settlement Outcomes Standards.

The Standards, in turn, inform and guide settlement planning and program delivery at national and local levels.

The ACT Government, with community organisations through the Refugee, Asylum Seeker and Humanitarian Coordination Committee, has developed a fact sheet of services for asylum seekers and humanitarian migrants. This is based on the Standards and is available on the Community Services Directorate website.

Accessibility of grants

Parts 3 (c)(i) and (ii) of the Resolution call on the ACT Government to commit to increasing the accessibility of grants to multicultural community groups, through increasing the ability for peak bodies to auspice small grants programs, and by running sector specific information and training sessions for grant applications.

The Community Services Directorate grants programs and CMTEDD's Capital of Equality Grants Program allows, and has funded, small groups through auspice arrangements with larger organisations and peak bodies.

The Community Service Directorate and CMTEDD also run information sessions for individuals and organisations on how to apply for a grant, how to use the 'SmartyGrants' grants management system and feedback sessions for unsuccessful applicants. Support is also available where there are difficulties applying for grants by phone and in person.

Additionally, CSD grant processes are continuously being streamlined to enhance accessibility. An example of this is a single application process for different National Multicultural Festival grant programs and the ability for organisations to apply for grant extensions to enable grant activities to be completed while applying for another grant at the same time.

To enhance accessibility, the Community Services Directorate employs targeted communication efforts to promote grants to specific cohorts for example the fortnightly Multicultural E-Newsletter, established community partner databases and networks including Ministerial Advisory Councils. The Directorate also supports grant teams in other Directorates by promoting their grant programs in the same way.

Madam Speaker, I'm also pleased to share that artsACT has undertaken a range of improvements over recent years including the introduction of SmartyGrants as a simple and easy to use platform for applicants. ArtsACT is also available to discuss applications with applicants either in person or via phone or Webex, and like the Community Services Directorate, facilitates a public information session for the opening of each funding round, for community members to seek information and ask questions, to assist applicants with their application.

To ensure all ACT small businesses could access the CMTEDD Business Support Grants and Small Business Hardship Scheme, CMTEDD translated information about these grants and promoted them widely.

In addition, their Adult Community Education grants program refers people to a phone number for a translating and interpreting services and runs information sessions to support grant applicants to submit quality applications.

Increasing civic participation through targeted support

Part 3 (d) of the Resolution focuses on support available to increase civic participation.

Many ACT Government directorates have committed to increasing civic participation of multicultural communities by translating information about their programs into other languages and through other approaches.

For example, EPSDD identifies the needs and interests of culturally and linguistically diverse residents in new estates in the ACT through their Mingle program.

TCCS assists people to complete applications for their ACT Road Safety Grants and works with the Office for Multicultural Affairs to reach and engage with multicultural stakeholders.

Major Projects Canberra has created new Diversity and Inclusion Procurement Guidelines to attract, recruit and retain people from culturally diverse backgrounds and target under-represented groups, such as recently arrived migrants and people on temporary visas.

And, 12% of people on the YourSay Panel identify as being from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and speak a language other than English at home. Through this Panel, participants can regularly share their views on community issues.

Uptake of English classes and conversation groups

Part 3 (e) of the Resolution seeks information about the uptake of English classes and conversation groups and provision of auxiliary childcare.

The Commonwealth Government has overarching responsibility for the providing English language classes to newly arrived migrants in Australia.

Through the Department of Home Affairs, it funds the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP).

This is a free service helping eligible migrants and humanitarian entrants to improve their English language skills and settle into Australia. It is delivered by Navitas in the ACT. The program also offers digital skills training and serves as a pathway to careers and further education. Free childcare is provided.

Unfortunately, the AMEP is only available to eligible permanent or temporary visa holders.

The ACT Government fills this gap in need by funding equivalent English language programs for temporary visa holders in the ACT who are not eligible for AMEP.

These are delivered by the Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services (MARSS) and CIT.

MARSS is funded \$40,000 per year to deliver English language programs for refugees, asylum seekers and ACT Services Access Card holders.

MARSS offers 3 English language programs: English for Employment; English for Living and the Home Tutor Program and refers participants to support services in employment, health, accommodation and grants. The Program does not currently support childcare options.

In 2020-21, there were 17 students enrolled in MARSS' English for Employment classes; 79 clients in English for Living and 33 in the Home Tutor Program.

CIT is funded \$10,000 per year by the ACT Government to deliver English courses to ACT Services Access Card asylum seekers who are not eligible for AMEP classes. Eligible participants are entitled to two free fulltime semesters (or part-time equivalent) of English.

Since 2015, CIT has provided this service to more than 115 ACT Access Card holders. Through this program, CIT works with other service providers to support ACT Access Card holders access other services including employment assistance.

In addition, Libraries ACT currently hosts nine English conversation classes across five libraries and online. While there are no childcare options for participants in library-hosted classes, access to online classes assists some parents with caring responsibilities.

Finally, there are a wide range of other English classes and conversation groups available across Canberra including free English learning in all ACT public schools; commercial English language programs for different purposes including diplomatic visa holders, international students and people in specific professions and vocations; and community groups and networks who support the learning of English through social English programs including parent, volunteer and youth groups, clubs, and employers.

Madam Speaker, we recognise there are still some gaps in the accessibility of government and community support services, grants and civic participation.

We anticipate the introduction of the *Multicultural Recognition Act* will include provisions that require the public service to ensure fair and equitable access by considering cultural and linguistic diversity in its service offerings.

We are committed to creating a welcoming and inclusive Canberra where everyone has equitable opportunities participate and contribute to our community.

I table the Government's response to the Assembly resolution.

END