



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESPONSE

Mr Alistair Coe MLA (Chair), Ms Tara Cheyne MLA (Deputy Chair), Mrs Vicki Dunne MLA,
Mr Michael Pettersson MLA, Ms Caroline Le Couteur MLA

ANSWER TO QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE DURING PUBLIC HEARINGS

Asked by TARA CHEYNE MLA on 14 May 2020: REBECCA CROSS took on notice the following question(s):

Ref: Hansard Transcript 14 May 2020, PAGE P202

In relation to:

MS CHEYNE: I am curious about your oversight of food and other general supermarket supplies in the ACT, particularly supplies generally, and how that has changed over time and whether you have been talking with any of the major retailers about supply and demand and how that has been affecting Canberrans.

Ms Cross: Early on in the Community Services Directorate, and then in the very early days in this role, obviously we were looking at the food relief arrangements. There was a government announcement about that. That has been led by the Community Services Directorate. That was very specifically looking at vulnerable people and how we would make sure they were able to access food and other essential items. Most of the discussions in terms of the broader issue of retail supply, as I understand it, have happened at the national level. There was a national coordination mechanism where the commonwealth in particular was talking with major retailers and looking at issues around not just supply but regulatory arrangements. My understanding of some of the issues around toilet paper was not that there was an insufficient supply but that they could not supply it quickly enough and the solution was to change some of the regulations around delivery hours so that toilet paper could be continually delivered until people stopped buying it. A lot of that happened at the national level, rather than being something that I had involvement in. I can check what involvement we have had within the ACT, but I think most of it would have happened through that national coordination mechanism.

MS CHEYNE: We have heard that the relief network that was established for Canberrans has been working very well. Do you have a bit of an overview about what the demand has been for that? Has the demand increased or decreased over time? And are we able to meet demand? Are some people still missing out or are we well resourced to make sure that anyone who needs that food or emergency relief can get it?

Ms Cross: My understanding is that \$1.5 million was allocated for food relief support in the ACT and that since 1 April we have been delivering food relief hampers. I am not aware of any issues where people have not been able to access it and I am not aware of any issues where we have needed to seek additional funding. I can check this with the Community Services Directorate for you but, as I understand, that was up and running very quickly and I am not aware of any issues that have come up since then.

MS CHEYNE: Can you take on notice to check with them and just get a bit of an update and also about what the demand has been for that service over time?

REBECCA CROSS: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:—

1. In regard to the National Supermarket Taskforce: The pandemic rapidly led to food insecurity in our community, through disruptions to the supply chain and community members experiencing increased financial stress and/or a need to self-isolate.

Funding provided through the ACT Government's stimulus package for the Canberra Relief Network (CRN) will allow the provision of food relief to support vulnerable Canberrans through the current pandemic.

Senior Officers from the ACT Community Services Directorate participate in the National Supermarket Taskforce – Food Supply Working Group, which remains connected to national discussions in relation to supply and demand. While there were previously supply issues with several product lines, this is improving.

The ACT continues to encourage National Cabinet to require supermarkets to ensure a stock remains available for the vulnerable through jurisdictional emergency food bank arrangements.

To date, the CRN has received supplies from Foodbank NSW and ACT and Woolworths.

The CRN has recently secured a grocery partnership with Woolworths. This partnership ensures consistent delivery of food staples and essential hygiene items, as well as supply to be able to provide gluten free staples to support vulnerable Canberrans.

2. In regard to the Canberra Relief Network: There has been a significant increase in the number of individuals in the ACT community who now find themselves vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in an unprecedented demand for food relief and the provision of other essential items.

The Canberra Relief Network (CRN) mobilises a collective effort across the sector to respond to these needs. By coordinating on behalf of Canberra community agencies, the CRN has greater leverage with suppliers to facilitate as much food as possible into a central location to then be distributed locally.

To date, 19 community organisations have signed up to be partner of the CRN.

The CRN Food Relief Centre commenced operations on 31 March 2020, from Exhibition Park in Canberra (EPIC).

A dedicated website and Connection Centre have been established, where vulnerable Canberrans can register for the program. Eligibility criteria ensure targeted services are provided.

The Connect Centre provides a central point of contact for individuals who are not currently known to a community food relief service in the Territory and connects them to local services closest to them. The Connect Centre is staffed by community development workers who have been seconded from Uniting Care Kippax and other community partner agencies.

As at close of business 15 May 2020, the Connect Centre recorded 3,254 calls (1,753 incoming calls, 1,501 outgoing calls), from vulnerable Canberrans as well as broader community interest in volunteering to support the initiative.

Delivery of food relief hampers commenced on 1 April 2020, with 3,244 hampers delivered to agencies as at close of business 15 May 2020.

We are not aware of Canberrans not being able to access the CRN, and would encourage vulnerable individuals to make contact with the CRN directly should they require support.

Whilst the CRN website provides for public donations, additional funding is not currently required for the operation of the CRN.

Approved for circulation to the Select Committee on the COVID-19 pandemic response

Signature: 

Date: 27 May 2020

By the Coordinator-General, Rebecca Cross