



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND COMMUNITY WELLBEING

Mr Johnathan Davis MLA (Chair), Mr James Milligan MLA (Deputy Chair), Mr Michael Pettersson MLA

Inquiry into ACT Budget 2021–22
ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

QoN No - 6

Elizabeth Kikkert MLA: To ask the Assistant Minister for Seniors, Veterans, Families and Community Services:

Ref: Budget Outlook p 150

In relation to: COVID-19 Response – Food security by Canberra Relief Network (CRN)

1. Can the Assistant Minister please provide a list of all community organisations who are involved in the operation of the CRN?
2. Since its establishment in March 2020, what periods of time did the CRN cease operations?
3. When the CRN was first established in March 2020, it faced a number of challenges that ultimately lead to its premature shutdown in July. What were the issues that arose?
 - a. What other issues concerning the operations of the CRN were identified and how were each of the issues addressed?
4. In considering past issues faced by the CRN, how will the new funding injection for food security be utilised, in contrast to when the CRN was first established?
5. Prior to the establishment of the CRN, several experienced community organisations provided food relief services to the ACT community with consistency, efficiency, cultural competency. What was the reasoning behind limiting their ability to provide better food security and creating the CRN instead?

EMMA DAVIDSON MLA: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:–

1. The following organisations have been engaged as community partners under the CRN since it was first established in April 2020:
 - Canberra City Care;
 - Canberra Region Community Service;
 - Communities@Work;
 - Community Services #1;
 - Companion House;
 - Gordon Community Centre;
 - Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation;

- Holy Cross Tuckerbox;
 - MARSS Australia;
 - Mustard Seed Uniting Food Pantry;
 - Red Cross;
 - St James Uniting Church;
 - St John’s Care;
 - St Paul’s Ginninderra Anglican Church – Helping Hand Food Pantry;
 - St Vincent de Paul Society (Dickson, Mitchell, Phillip, Weston Creek);
 - The Panty @ Watson (YWAM);
 - Tuggeranong Uniting Church;
 - UnitingCare Kippax;
 - University of Canberra Food Pantry;
 - Wesley Uniting Church; and
 - Woden Community Service.
2. The CRN was first established in March 2020 as an emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic and as demand eased the model flexed down on 30 June 2021.

Following the announcement of the ACT entering a second lockdown on 12 August 2021, food relief efforts were provided via an interim online model.

On 16 August 2021, the CRN Advisory Committee met and discussed the ACT’s ongoing food needs and it was agreed to flex back up all aspects of the CRN. The CRN Food Relief Centre recommenced operations on 18 August 2021, from Exhibition Park in Canberra (EPIC), with deliveries commencing on 30 August 2021 once stock was received. The online model operated during this interim period to support food relief.

3. The closure of the CRN in June 2021 was not the result of any issues, instead it was a planned closure, noting the CRN was established as an emergency response and was not intended for ongoing full scale activation.
- a. Some concern has been raised that the CRN hamper model does not meet the needs of all members of the community, including high risk settings and the multicultural community, as the items provided did not meet their needs and was not accessible.

The CRN model was never intended to be the sole food provider in the ACT and the ACT Government has been working closely with members of the multicultural community and wider community sector to provide a tailored response to needs during the 2021 lockdown. This has included community partners providing prepared meals to some high-risk settings as well as supplementing the CRN hamper model with fresh food from community pantries.

4. The funding provided in 2021 for the CRN is being used to purchase non-perishable food and essential items (including hygiene and baby items) for distribution, and broader operational requirements including warehouse set up, ICT associated costs and staffing.

The 2021-22 ACT Budget announced funding of \$475,000 to support the establishment of a new dedicated database to capture information about the demand and need for food relief in the Territory. This will enable a greater understanding of the food relief service system and will assist informed and targeted decision making.

5. The CRN was established at a time where there were significant shortages of supply for food and essential items. Through the introduction of a centralised food distribution model and a grocery partnership with a national supply chain, the CRN was able to facilitate as much food as possible into a central location to distribute to support vulnerable Canberrans.

The CRN does not limit an organisation's ability to provide food relief and many partners ran their food pantries in parallel to the CRN hamper model, to supplement the provision of broader items to clients, including fresh produce, meats, and refrigerated and frozen products.

The CRN model encompasses a wraparound model of support, with individuals connected to their local food pantry to provide broader supports to understand the individual's needs, both immediately and ongoing.

As noted in Question 1, many food pantry providers were consulted and remain involved in the running of the CRN. The CRN was never intended to be the sole food provider in the ACT and has been working closely with community organisations to ensure food support is available to the Canberra community.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing

Signature: *Emma Davidson*

Date: 4 November 2021

By the Assistant Minister for Seniors, Veterans, Families and Community Services, Emma Davidson
MLA.