

**2021**

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

**REVISED MINISTERIAL STATEMENT  
Update on the New Programs to Address Homelessness in the ACT**

**Presented by  
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The experience or the risk of homelessness is one of the most distressing and difficult occurrences that can happen to someone. When we lose our home, we lose a sense of security and stability that helps us make decisions about other things in our life. The people that work in Canberra's specialist homelessness sector understand the complexity and distress that face people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Canberra's specialist homelessness sector is passionate and hardworking and offer person-centred services, they understand that when you're working with people who are often managing complex situations, there is not a one size fits all approach. They play an essential role in our efforts, as Government, to end homelessness across the ACT.

Through OneLink, the Territory's central intake provider for homelessness services, people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness discuss their situation with Onelink's trained staff and are linked to appropriate specialist help, whether that is primarily accommodation or about other concerns.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the ACT Government has worked quickly and closely with sector partners to provide the support they required so they could keep delivering essential services.

In March 2020, Housing ACT participated in three focus groups to look at issues specific to:

- Women's services, chaired by Toora Women Inc;
- Rough sleepers and homelessness, chaired by CatholicCare; and
- Congregate or shared living accommodation settings chaired by Havelock Housing Association.

Discussed in all groups was the provision of suitable accommodation for those experiencing homelessness, domestic and family violence, or living in shared accommodation settings, particularly if anyone in those situations was affected by COVID-19 and needed to self-isolate or quarantine.

Based on this collaboration with the sector, in April 2020, the ACT Government provided \$3 million to meet the anticipated increased demand on services from the impact of COVID-19 and support new initiatives.

We have delivered:

A Client Support Fund of \$330,000 for the existing central referral agency OneLink to respond to increased demand on the homelessness services sector. As of 30 June 2021, approximately 73 individuals and families have received support through this service.

An example of this fund being used is a partnership with the YWCA and A Gender Agenda, OneLink filled a service gap for transgender people at risk of or experiencing homelessness and established a 12-month shared housing model of supported accommodation.

We delivered \$832,000 for emergency and long-term accommodation support for men, women and children to keep people COVID-safe.

This resulted in innovative and responsive solutions, including:

- Expanding the Axial Housing pilot to house rough sleepers during COVID-19. The program based on Housing First principles provides wrap-around supports needed to sustain a tenancy and not result in exits into homelessness after COVID-19. As of 30 June 2021, 26 people are currently engaged with the program.
- Upgrading and opening the Winter Lodge, run by Argyle Community Housing, as temporary accommodation for men experiencing homelessness during COVID-19. From May to October 2020, the lodge provided temporary accommodation and appropriate exits for 121 men experiencing homelessness during the colder months. Importantly, 44 of those clients were able to exit into longer-term housing, such as Havelock House, Ainslie Village or into the private market. At 30 June 2021, a further 52 men have been accommodated since the service recommenced on 3 May 2021.
- Funding for CatholicCare to provide safe housing for women and children experiencing homelessness during COVID-19. At 30 June 2021, Mackillop House has housed approximately 56 clients and provides support services to build their capability to live independently.
- Funding for OneLink's to increase its capacity to coordinate referrals for temporary accommodation options such as, hotelling, including for service providers of congregate living accommodation where a client needs to self-isolate or quarantine. This program assisted 140 individuals and families up to 30 June 2021.
- Funding to upgrade and furnish existing public housing to operate as crisis and shelter accommodation.

Through listening, collaboration, innovation and planning we've supported the community and mitigated some of the impacts of COVID-19.

But our work is not done.

Through the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement, the ACT Government has committed a further \$18 million over four years to further expand the capacity of the specialist homelessness sector.

In the first tranche, the ACT Government delivered \$1.95 million to bolster the sector, including:

- expanding the Early Morning Centre to a seven day per week service with an additional \$300,000 over two years.
- increasing emergency support and accommodation funding to OneLink by \$450,000 over two years, to continue to provide further tenancy and client support services.

- continuation of Mackillop House and Winter Lodge services that were established in response to COVID-19, and the successful Axial Housing program, with a combined \$1.2 million over two years.

In addition, the Government has provided \$ 700k over 4 years to ACT Shelter to increase its capacity as the peak body, providing systemic advocacy and policy advice on social housing, homelessness and affordable housing.

The government remains committed to collaborating with the sector through a joint planning process to not only support new contract arrangements post 2023, but also to continue building upon and improving outcomes under the ACT Housing Strategy so more Canberrans have access to a safe, secure home.

In May this year the Government agreed to Service Funding Agreements for the ACT's 27 funded specialist homelessness service providers being extended to June 2023.

The extension of funding agreements for a further two years means more collaboration between Government and service providers including the development of a shared outcome-based framework. This includes working together to move human services to a commissioning for outcomes environment over the next several years.

Commissioning is about genuine partnership and co-design between government, sector partners and the community to plan, improve and, where necessary, redesign services to meet people's needs.

As a first of many in this strategic partnership, Minister Berry and I hosted a Ministerial Round Table with Homeless Sector CEO's and related peak bodies on 6 July. The meeting was an opportunity to deeply listen and discuss the values underpinning this strategic partnership, key planning elements, timelines, sector engagement and governance options for the next 18 months.

The Service Funding Agreements extension includes a community sector sustainability review, jointly funded by the Community Services Directorate and community services sector, due to be finalised by the end of 2021.

The review will be used to examine the level and cost of services, outputs and outcomes and the needs of all the sector stakeholders, to inform future service design and service system enhancements to improve outcomes for the sector and community.

As we move forward, it is important that our services can continue meeting the needs of existing cohorts and are prepared to respond to emerging needs. The sector has demonstrated its capacity to respond rapidly to changing needs and circumstances during COVID-19. The ACT Government thanks them for their selfless hard work.

While I have spoken about new initiatives focused on supporting our community it is important to recognise the services who worked tirelessly to help people experiencing homelessness throughout this ongoing pandemic.

Street to Home provide daily support and case management to Canberrans experiencing homelessness. Workers actively seek those sleeping rough and engage with them to build relationships based on understanding and respect.

Red Cross Roadhouse, the Early Morning Centre (EMC) and Blue Door at Ainslie Village all provide free food services,

Red Cross Roadhouse and the Early Morning Centre provide dine-in options for patrons and guests in compliance with COVID-19 restrictions.

The Early Morning Centre also hosts several inclusive and skill-building support services including arts and craft classes, phone, computer, and internet access – some of which have recommenced since May 2021.

I would like to thank these services for their commitment and support of COVID-19 physical distancing restrictions. This includes providing face masks help and checking in people sleeping rough through the Check In CBR App who may not have access to a mobile phone.

I would also like to mention and thank Housing ACT staff who continue to deliver and adapt services to the community throughout the COVID-19 pandemic in line with the restrictions. While standard face to face visits were on hold from March 2020 to 2 June 2020, Housing ACT made phone contact with public housing tenants to check on their health and wellbeing.

The start of the pandemic caused a lot of financial stress for Canberrans and hit public housing tenants particularly hard. One of the ACT Government's first responses to this was to provide one-off \$250 payments to public housing households. Housing ACT worked diligently to ensure that all households received this funding.

The Central Access Point for tenants, located at Nature Conservation House in Belconnen, has remained open throughout for a degree of face-to-face support.

Importantly, this period signified true collaboration across our Government with Housing ACT, ACT Health and Community Services Directorate to undertake logistical planning and preparedness for outbreak management. The *Local Response Team Action Plan* outlines Housing ACT's response in the event of an outbreak in a multi-unit complex and is updated regularly.

Madame Speaker, the programs developed and implemented increased the level of collaboration and innovation within the sector to improve outcomes for at-risk Canberrans and the community.

COVID-19 has left a significant mark across Australia. The responses, programs and services highlighted today demonstrate that Canberra remains prepared to face challenges and respond with the community at the centre of decision making. As we continue with the lingering impact of the pandemic, we must build upon this progress so all Canberrans have access to a safe and secure home.