

2020

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

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE
SELECT COMMITTEE ON COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESPONSE
INTERIM REPORT 4 AND FINAL REPORT**

**Presented by
Andrew Barr MLA
Chief Minister
December 2020**

INTRODUCTION

On 2 April 2020, the ACT Legislative Assembly established a select committee to consider and report to the Assembly on any matter relating to the ACT Government's health and financial response and any other matter relating to the COVID-19 Pandemic as it relates to the ACT.

The Government would like to thank members of the community and community groups who have provided submissions or evidence to the Committee.

The Government would also like to note that some responses which are noted or agreed in principle are contingent on future Government funding decisions.

OVERARCHING ACT GOVERNMENT COMMENTS

Final Report

The ACT Government acknowledges the Final Report released by the Committee on 13 October 2020 and notes that no additional recommendations are contained in the Final Report in addition to those outlined in Interim Reports 1, 2, 3 and 4.

ACT Government response to Interim Reports 1, 2 and 3

The ACT Government previously tabled the following responses to the Select Committee's interim reports:

- Interim Report 1 on 4 June 2020.
- Interim Report 2 on 2 July 2020.
- Interim Report 3 on 13 August 2020.

The recommendations of those reports, and the Government's response to them, are provided at Appendix A. Appendix A also includes updates arising from the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement for the 10th ACT Legislative Assembly which relate to Interim Report recommendations. These updates are to Interim Report 1, recommendations 2 and 15, and Interim Report 3, recommendation 18.

COVID-19 monitoring and response in the ACT

ACT Public Emergency Declaration

The ACT Public Emergency Declaration has been extended and is now due to expire on 17 February 2021.

Current ACT COVID-19 situation

As at 20 November 2020, there have been 115 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the ACT with 111 recovered, three deaths recorded and one active cases. The ACT has recorded 116,209 negative COVID-19 tests.

The last confirmed case in the ACT was recorded on 18 November 2020. The individual is a diplomat who arrived in Australia on 15 November 2020 via Sydney International Airport and travelled to Canberra by private vehicle.

ABC of COVID-Safe Travel

The ACT Government is reminding people of the ABC of COVID-safe travel when travelling outside the ACT:

- **Avoid** COVID-affected areas - check the COVID website of the state or territory you are travelling to. If you are welcoming relatives or visitors from interstate, please ask them not to come if they are travelling from an area with a recent case or are feeling unwell.
- **Behave** in a COVID-safe way - be vigilant with hand and respiratory hygiene, maintain physical distancing from other groups, and stay home if feeling unwell.
- **Check** back when you're home - monitor the COVID website of the state or territory you visited to see if they had any cases, for two weeks after your return. Follow the website's advice about testing and self-isolation. If you feel unwell with COVID symptoms while away or when you return, please get tested immediately and self-isolate until you get the result.

Reminder to get tested

The ACT Government continues to remind people in the community who are experiencing even the mildest of COVID-19 symptoms to continue to get tested. This is particularly important as summer approaches, borders open up and people increasingly travel interstate. Getting tested for COVID-19 remains the only effective method of assessing the ACT's position and detecting COVID-19 in the community.

Easing of restrictions in the ACT

Step 3.2 COVID-19 restrictions are currently in place in the ACT with a further easing of restrictions on Friday, 13 November 2020. The key changes to restrictions are:

- gatherings increasing to a maximum occupancy of 500 patrons (from 200) for each usable space, subject to density restrictions being met. This will assist community events with the COVID Safe Event Protocol also being updated; and
- patrons in an outdoor space will be able to eat and drink while standing rather than having to be seated.

All other current restrictions and venue capacity rules as part of Step 3.2 remain the same. Further information on the easing of COVID-19 restrictions and social distancing requirements that remain in place can be found at the [ACT Government's COVID-19 website](https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/).¹

Check In CBR app

As the ACT continues to adjust to a new COVID normal, electronic check-in systems are important to ensure that contact tracing can be carried out quickly and easily should there be new cases of COVID-19 in the ACT.

The Check in CBR app, developed by ACT Health, was launched in mid-September 2020. The app now has around 1,800 venues registered and more than 60,000 downloads. The app is a contactless, secure and convenient way for people to sign into a Canberra venue and data is stored securely with ACT Health for 28 days in the event that contact tracing is needed. The app allows contact tracers immediate access to information about who was in a venue at a specific time.

The simplicity of the information requested through the Check in CBR app, the security of data and the ability of the app to remember individuals' details once entered is likely to lead to a higher adoption rate of the app and use at venues.

ACT Health has offered to share the app with other states and territories to support their contact tracing capabilities.

¹ <https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/>

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure they action all recommendations that the Committee has presented in its previous interim reports.

Government Response

Noted.

The Government has responded to the recommendations set out in the Select Committee's first three reports. These responses are included at Appendix A. Appendix A also includes updates arising from the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement for the 10th ACT Legislative Assembly. These updates are listed against Interim Report 1, recommendations 2 and 15, and Interim Report 3, recommendation 18.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Health and their successor, regularly update the Assembly and the community on the progress of Canberra Health Services in addressing the backlog of elective surgery.

Government Response

Agreed.

On 1 July 2020, the ACT Government announced a funding boost to deliver up to 2,000 additional elective surgeries, resulting in more than 16,000 surgeries planned in 2020-21.

The ACT Government publishes quarterly performance reports, which detail activity in the Territory's public hospital system, including information regarding the number of elective surgeries delivered in the period, and the number of patients on the elective surgery wait list. The Assembly also receives six-monthly Statement of Performance reports which include information regarding elective surgery timeliness performance. The Annual Report includes information on elective surgery activity in the ACT.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that Canberra Health Services as a matter of priority complete and circulate the COVID-safe advice to elective surgery patients.

Government Response

Agreed.

On 1 September 2020, all patients on the elective surgery waiting list were provided with advice regarding the screening processes for COVID-19 and a copy of the screening tool.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that Canberra Health Services provide that advice to the Committee or its successor as soon as it becomes available.

Government Response

Agreed.

A copy of the letter sent to patients, including a copy of the screening tool, is provided at Appendix B.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Health and Canberra Health Services explore with Royal Australasian College of Surgeons and the Australian Society of Anaesthetists further timely and effective COVID-19 screening for pre-operative patients.

Government Response

Agreed.

Preoperative screening and testing processes were explored with the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons and the Australian Society of Anaesthetists. Following discussions, it was decided to continue with the current pre-operative screening process prior to admission. If positive COVID-19 numbers increased in the ACT these processes would be reviewed.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government advocate to the Commonwealth Government that telehealth services are made available indefinitely.

Government Response

Agreed.

The ACT Minister for Health wrote to the Commonwealth Minister for Health on 27 July 2020 and 25 August 2020 seeking support for retaining the temporary Medical Benefits Schedule telehealth services beyond 30 September 2020. Other State Health Ministers have also advocated for this. The Commonwealth has agreed to extend telehealth services to 31 March 2021.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government work with the NGO sector to increase capacity to respond to those experiencing stress and anxiety and focus on emotional and psychological wellbeing of community members as the pandemic progresses and in the longer term.

Government Response

Agreed.

The ACT Government has supported NGOs to continue to deliver vital services to the community during the COVID-19 pandemic. This has included funding to support adjustments to models of service delivery (for example, moving to online service provision), to meet increased demand and transition staff to work from home arrangements.

In addition to financial assistance during COVID-19, ACT Health Directorate has undertaken ongoing, regular communication with all funded NGOs to monitor demand and unmet need. ACT Health Directorate will continue regular communication, working with the NGO sector to monitor community needs, including those relating to stress, anxiety and broader emotional and psychological wellbeing and ensure available supports are adequate as the pandemic progresses into the longer term.

Work is also currently underway within ACT Health Directorate to map Government provided or funded services in the ACT, through development of the Mental Health Services Plan, and implementation of the ACT Regional Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan. In the context of this work, broader strategic planning in relation to future mental health service needs and how our service system can be designed to best respond to them will incorporate emerging needs associated with COVID-19 including those identified in this report.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government increase funding to the NGO sector to enable them to respond to those experiencing stress and anxiety and focus on emotional and psychological wellbeing of community members as the pandemic progresses and in the longer term.

Government Response

Agreed in principle.

The ACT Government has provided a number of funding and support packages to support NGOs to respond to the challenges of COVID-19 and assist community members.

A health sector stimulus package provided \$1.4 million in support for 46 NGOs, across a range of health domains including mental health, to respond to demand pressures.

On 6 May 2020, the ACT Government announced the COVID-19 Mental Health Support Package. This included \$2.571 million in additional funds for mental health NGO service delivery, to increase capacity of existing services and to scope and support new and innovative services to respond to emerging need.

The ACT Government also provided an additional \$275,000 for targeted mental health support for young people, as part of the Youth Support Package announced on 12 August 2020.

The mental health impacts of COVID-19 will remain for some time after the pandemic has ended. It is therefore anticipated that additional support for mental health NGO service delivery may be required beyond this investment and community need will be monitored and responded to over time.

As noted in the response to recommendation 7, the emerging needs associated with COVID-19 will be incorporated in the development of the Mental Health Services Plan, implementation of the ACT Regional Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan and broader strategic planning in relation to future mental health service needs and how our service system can be designed to best respond to them.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that that the ACT Government take steps to engage with the Commonwealth Government to extend the current capabilities of mental health plans, including expanding the number of free psychologist and counsellor sessions that can be accessed.

Government Response

Agreed in principle

On 2 August 2020, the Commonwealth Government announced an expansion of the Medicare subsidised psychological therapy program (MSPTP) to provide an additional 10 MSPTP sessions for people subject to restrictions in areas impacted by COVID-19. This measure is currently available until 31 March 2021. ACT Health Directorate will work with the Territory's Primary Health Network, Capital Health Network and Canberra Health Services to advocate to the Commonwealth where appropriate, to support provision of initiatives such as mental health plans that meet the needs of the Canberra community.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that that the ACT Government work with other governments and providers to ensure that all medical institutions have the capability to grant mental health plans through telehealth for young people who cannot attend in person.

Government Response

Agreed in principle

The ACT Government encourages broad access to mental health services and the availability of mental health support plans (MHSP). It notes that the guidelines on the provision of MHSP are set under the Better Access Initiative managed by the Commonwealth Government. Under this scheme, people can seek support through their GP, or through referral to a Psychiatrist or Paediatrician. ACT Health Directorate will work in partnership with the Territory's Primary Health Network, Capital Health Network and Canberra Health Services to advocate to the Commonwealth where appropriate, to ensure that mental health plans and telehealth are accessible and available to meet the needs of the Canberra community.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider a campaign to encourage young people to reach out for help when they need it and encourage safe spaces where young people can reach out for help.

Government Response

Noted.

The Youth Advisory Council is being consulted as part of a broader ACT Government strategy targeting youth mental health in the ACT. Young people remain a priority group for the ACT Government and will be considered in future campaign planning.

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government make a commitment to increase mental health funding year on year, particularly for youth mental health.

Government Response

Noted.

The ACT Government allocates funding taking into account all of the needs of the community.

On 6 May 2020, the ACT Government announced the COVID-19 Mental Health Support Package. In combination with other COVID-19 support initiatives, this package provided nearly \$4.5 million in additional funds to support mental health NGO services, expand Canberra Health Services programs to respond to and support people experiencing mental health crisis in the community, and to support new and innovative services to respond to emerging need.

The ACT Government also provided an additional \$275,000 for targeted mental health support for young people, as part of the Youth Support Package that was announced on 12 August 2020.

The Government's election commitments also set out further investments in mental health support for Canberra's young people.

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide clear and transparent advice on the COVID-19 website on why mask use is not currently recommended and the circumstances that would need to occur for the official position on that to change.

Government Response

Agreed.

This information is available on the ACT Government [COVID-19 website](#).²

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide clear and transparent advice on the COVID-19 website on why there is not a 'regional border closure' and the circumstances that would need to occur for that to ever be seriously considered.

Government Response

Agreed in principle.

Travel guidance is available on the COVID-19 website and social media channels, and local media has been briefed on this issue. Additional information will be added to the website. However, it is important to note that due to the inherent uncertainty created by the COVID-19 pandemic it is not always possible to provide advice on every possible eventuality.

Recommendation 15

The Committee recommends that ACT Government establishes on-going liaison protocols to work with NSW to manage the COVID-19 restrictions.

Government Response

Agreed.

The ACT Office of the Chief Health Officer has regular meetings and discussions with counterparts in NSW in relation to restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

² <https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/stay-safe-and-healthy/protect-yourself#Using-masks-latest-advice>

Recommendation 16

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider providing additional financial assistance to ensure students returning to Canberra to attend university, who are not able to find jobs, can access the support they need.

Government Response

Noted.

The ACT Government is providing emergency financial support for students through the Australian Red Cross. This support is helping students in financial distress due to COVID-19 who were ineligible for relief under Australian Government programs. This support is available to both domestic and international students.

Recommendation 17

The Committee recommends that that in its response to COVID-19 the ACT Government considers the different needs of different groups in terms of age, gender, ethnicity and any other relevant factors.

Government Response

Agreed.

The ACT Government continues to develop targeted programs and associated communications and campaigns for different audiences. This includes considerations for translated resources, language styles, talent sourcing, and specific media targeting. The audience profiling is documented as part of campaign planning for the development of any new communications in response to COVID-19.

The ACT Government undertook mapping of new and emerging needs in the community throughout the pandemic, utilising intelligence from a range of sources including front-line services. This mapping has had a key focus on identifying vulnerabilities in key groups including people with disability, people on temporary protection visas, children, young people and families, people on low incomes, women experiencing domestic and family violence and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. This mapping has informed a range of ACT Government responses and further information on these community supports is available on the ACT COVID-19 [website](https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/business-and-work/economic-survival-package/supporting-the-community-sector).³

³ <https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/business-and-work/economic-survival-package/supporting-the-community-sector>

Recommendation 18

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government should ensure that the human rights of all members of the community are considered so that there is equitable access to appropriate and quality support.

Government Response

Agreed.

The Government is committed to upholding human rights and the right to equality of all Canberrans in responding to the COVID-19 emergency.

In all decision-making, ACT public authorities are bound under the Human Rights Act to give proper consideration to relevant human rights and to act consistently with those rights.

Recommendation 19

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are a particularly at-risk group and ensure this is a consideration when determining where to focus further resources as the COVID-19 pandemic progresses.

Government Response

Agreed.

ACT Health Directorate continues to work with the Community Controlled and broader health sector to support the complex needs of at-risk priority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, throughout the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services (Winnunga) has been a close partner in developing ACT's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Winnunga has:

- been a member of the COVID-19 Primary Care Emergency Response working group;
- agreed to provide support and clinical management for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander clients who are diagnosed with COVID-19;
- been contracted by the Australian Government to operate a GP-led respiratory assessment centre; and
- worked closely with ACT Health to develop an outbreak plan for correctional settings. This planning includes consideration of culturally appropriate advice, support and clinical management to be provided by Winnunga with specialised support as needed.

The ACT's general planning has focussed on managing outbreaks in high risk settings. These are defined as a setting where there is a likelihood of a risk for rapid spread and ongoing

spread of infection. This would include any living arrangements that put Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people at increased risk.

The ACT Government has allocated \$580,000 to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and services during COVID-19:

- Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation will receive \$200,000 to enhance capacity to deliver their youth support services and integrated services for families;
- Winnunga will receive \$100,000 to deliver a range of holistic wellbeing supports for individuals and families. This in addition to almost \$250,000 provided to Winnunga to support its COVID-19 health response;
- Relationships Australia Dhunlung Yarra will receive \$100,000 to enhance its capacity to provide counselling and conflict resolution services;
- Canberra Rape Crisis Centre Nguru Program will receive \$75,000 to increase the provision of holistic, culturally appropriate counselling for people who have experienced sexual assault and their families; and
- Tjillari Justice Aboriginal Corporation and Yeddung Mura Aboriginal Corporation will each receive \$20,000 to continue their important work supporting individuals and families, including those who are or have been engaged with the justice system.

A total of \$65,000 will also be available for grass roots organisations to support activities that help with connection to culture and mental health. This includes support for funerals and Sorry Business during the COVID-19 pandemic. Work to identify the most appropriate organisations to receive or distribute these funds will continue in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Recommendation 20

The Committee recommends that the ACT Education Directorate assess the needs of students before requesting the return of any electronic devices such as Chrome Books and other internet access devices.

Government Response

Agreed.

The Education Directorate continues to provide devices to every secondary student enrolled in an ACT public school, years 7 through to 12. This ensures that all public high school and college students have access to a device for both home and school use.

During the pandemic, the ACT Government provided internet services to those public school students that required it. This service has been extended to continue to support secondary

students.

On-campus learning has resumed for all students and it is not essential for primary school students to have access to devices at home as their key mode of learning is at their school. The devices utilised during the COVID-19 pandemic remote learning period are ordinarily used in classrooms for learning and were required to be returned to the classroom to facilitate classroom learning.

The Education Directorate is well positioned to redistribute the devices if remote learning was required again.

Recommendation 21

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government improve support to schools to ensure students have not been disproportionately disadvantaged by online schooling, including providing access to free tutors for students who may have fallen behind or who attend traditionally disadvantaged schools.

Government Response

Noted.

The issue of disadvantage and its impact on student learning is well understood in the ACT. Supporting the learning of less advantaged students is a priority of the Future of Education Strategy.

In the ACT, schools focussed on wellbeing first and put structures in place throughout the pupil free and remote learning periods to support students and their families with access to resources to support wellbeing and learning.

Following the return to face-to-face learning, teachers continued to utilise the model of wellbeing first while they assessed student need. Teachers have been supporting targeted interventions throughout term 3 and 4 to continue to support student learning. Where required this has been supplemented by specialist expertise including allied health professionals.

The Education Directorate will continue to provide targeted support services to all ACT public schools, so that all schools can continue to support students at their point of need.

Recommendation 22

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government engage with local universities to ensure that the potential disadvantage faced by both year 11 and 12 students will not affect university placements.

Government Response

Agreed in principle.

The Education Directorate has excellent working relationships with the Australian National University, Australian Catholic University and the University of Canberra and engages with them on a regular basis. This will continue to be strengthened to ensure ACT senior secondary students are not disadvantaged regarding university placements into the future.

While university admissions policies are the responsibility of each university, the Board of Senior Secondary Studies has been working closely with schools to ensure no student is disadvantaged due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendation 23

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government, in its COVID-19 pandemic response, include targeted programs and improve access to services for young people, particularly in the areas of education; mental health; employment; housing; rental affordability and homelessness.

Government Response

Noted.

The ACT Government acknowledges that young people have been particularly impacted by the pandemic and its associated economic effects.

The ACT Government has provided a range of interventions and supports for young people during the pandemic. A current example of this is the new \$16.75 million JobTrainer Fund, jointly funded by the ACT Government and Commonwealth Government. JobTrainer offers free vocational education and training to young people (17 to 24 years, who have finished school), and job seekers across Canberra in areas of employment growth. JobTrainer will deliver approximately 3,500 training places in key industries and occupations.

In addition, the \$2.4 million Youth Support Package will help young people through social isolation, unemployment or difficulties find a job; and the \$1.7 million Supporting Children, Young People and their Families Package will help ease the financial stress for young carers, foster and kinship carers and young people and provide one off payments to non-

government service providers to help them deliver services. More information on these programs and services is available at this link on the ACT COVID-19 [website](#).⁴

Recommendation 24

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government create a resource to assist young people to access services and assistance, across different services categories.

Government Response

Noted.

Information to support young people is currently available via ACT Government directorate web sites including the Community Services Directorate, Education Directorate, Health Directorate and Access Canberra. The Government continually reviews and refines these resources to improve their relevance and accessibility to a range of audiences and people with different needs. The Government will continue to consider how information about services can be improved for young people, so they can more readily identify and access the services and assistance required to support their needs.

In relation to mental health resources, the ACT Government is developing an Online Youth Navigation Portal which will be part of the ACT's Youth Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Project. The Portal will provide individualised online and phone services for young people.

Recommendation 25

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government should dedicate funding toward disability services and related organisations so they may prioritise education, resources and training for people with disabilities on preparedness for emergency medical situations.

Government Response

Agreed.

In May 2020, the ACT Government released the ACT COVID-19 Disability Strategy. The Strategy provides support for people with disability in areas such as: accessible information and messaging; access to necessary supplies; access to personal and emergency supports; reducing the impact of social isolation and financial disadvantage; and increasing safety.

In June \$850,000 of funding was announced through the Stimulus package to be disseminated through the Action Plan for the Strategy. Phase 1 funding allocated \$450,000

⁴ <https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/business-and-work/economic-survival-package/supporting-the-community-sector>

to advocacy services, making PPE more accessible, targeted communication, and enhanced behaviour supports.

Phase 2 includes a Better Safety project that builds the confidence and skills of disability supporters to identify family and domestic abuse and violence, individual grants to reduce home-based pressures on people with disability and their family carers, support for staff to attend face to face training in infection control and use of PPE, and support for carers to isolate as necessary.

Recommendation 26

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensures that there are disability access and inclusion plans for all of Canberra Health Services across ACT Health.

Government Response

Agreed.

The ACT Government has committed to the development of Disability Action and Inclusion Plans (DAIPs) across all government directorates as part of the implementation of the Disability Justice Strategy 2019-2029. Canberra Health Services is currently undertaking a Disability Needs Assessment review to inform the creation and implementation of a DAIP.

The Office for Disability is supporting this work and has provided funding for the Canberra Health Services to access consultancy services from the Australian Network on Disability, who have expertise in this area. Canberra Health Services has commenced consultations including meeting with the Disability Reference Group.

The COVID-19 – An ACT Operational Plan for People with Disability was finalised and publicly released by the ACT Government in September 2020.

The Government is also committed to the development of a Disability Health Strategy, which will be co-designed with people with disability, their families and carers, and organisations across the health system.

Recommendation 27

The Committee recommends the ACT Government ensure that dedicated funding for trained disability advocates is available to support people with disability. This includes trained advocates to work with existing domestic and family violence services so they have the capacity to provide accessible and appropriate supports to women with disabilities experiencing violence.

Government Response

Agreed.

The ACT Government has funded both the ACT Disability Aged Carer Advocacy Service (ADACAS) and Advocacy for Inclusion for 12 months under phase 1 of the COVID-19 Disability Strategy to provide skilled advocacy to support people with disability.

Under phase 2 of the COVID 19 Disability strategy a cross-sector collaborative project has started that aims to build the capability of disability support organisations to better identify and respond to the needs of people with disability experiencing domestic and family violence (DFV). This initiative has been codesigned and is completed. The implementation of this project has not as yet been fully finalised. The project currently has four components:

- *increased training to problem noticers* – DFV training for disability support workers and other supports to increase their ability to respond and support people with disability experiencing DFV and other violence or abuse;
- *embedded skilled workers* - a community of practice headed up by a skilled DFV worker embedded in the disability sector and a skilled disability worker embedded in DFV facing service. These workers would support disability supporters to become more DFV aware, and DFV services to be more disability responsive;
- *discretionary funding* to support people with disability experiencing violence to take actions to increase their safety and capacity to make decisions; and
- *a cross-sector steering group* focussing on action research to support evaluation and next steps.

Recommendation 28

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government and the Courts work with service providers, such as DVCS and the Women’s Legal Centre to develop ways to:

- reduce or remove barriers for applicant and victim to access the Courts remotely;
- ensure accessible information is available about legal processes and the supports on offer for applicants, respondents, victims and perpetrators of domestic violence;
- ensure measures are taken to adequately assess and prioritise the safety of those impacted by domestic violence;
- mitigate the impacts on victims, perpetrators, applicants and respondents of delayed court hearings and the issues encountered in monitoring probation, parole and bail conditions under COVID-19 restrictions.

Government Response

Noted.

The ACT Government is working with the ACT Courts and Tribunal and other agencies involved in responding to domestic and family violence through the Family Violence Intervention Program (FVIP) Coordinating Committee. Key goals of the FVIP include to maximise the safety and protection of victims of family violence and for agencies to work together cooperatively and effectively.

It is noted that the Magistrates Court has continued hearing applications for Family Violence and Personal Orders throughout the pandemic and there has been no delay in these matters. Criminal hearings were delayed for a period and the Court is currently working through those matters that were delayed. It is noted that ACT Corrective Services has continued to monitor offenders serving a community-based orders without any significant interruption.

Recommendation 29

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government action all previous recommendations, in relation to housing and homelessness, so as to provide relief and certainty for those in need of appropriate housing and support.

Government Response

Noted.

The Government has responded to the recommendations set out in the Select Committee’s first three reports. These responses are included at Appendix A. Appendix A also includes updates arising from the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement for the 10th ACT

Legislative Assembly. Two of these updates are to Interim Report 1, recommendations 2 and 15, which relate to community housing and homelessness.

Recommendation 30

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government extends COVID-19 related assistance to tenants and landlords both residential and commercial for at least until a couple of months following the end of the ACT COVID-19 public health emergency declaration.

Government Response

Noted.

The ACT Government has put in place legislative measures (through the [*Residential Tenancies \(COVID-19 Emergency\) Declaration 2020 \(No 3\)*](#))⁵ to continue to support tenants and landlords and to provide a smooth transition out of the residential tenancy eviction moratorium. These measures are:

- a transition period which limits evictions on the basis of rent arrears for COVID-19 impacted households in certain circumstances;
- the continued ability to negotiate reduced rent;
- a requirement for the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal (ACAT) to consider making a payment order instead of an eviction order for COVID-19 impacted household;
- the continued ability for a tenant in a COVID-19 impacted household to terminate their fixed-term tenancy agreement early and without penalty;
- continued restrictions on a negative listing being made about a person from a COVID-19 impacted household on tenancy databases;
- the ability for a tenant from a COVID-19 impacted household who had previous ACAT orders suspended during the moratorium to apply to ACAT to vary or set aside those orders;
- the continued ability for tenants on pre 6 April 2020 fixed-term tenancies to pay just two weeks rent in advance (all other tenants are already able to do this).

These measures will operate from 23 October (after the eviction moratorium ended) until 31 January 2021 (unless extended).

For commercial leases, the ACT Government has put in place measures to require commercial landlords to negotiate in good faith lease arrangements for tenants who have been financially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The [*Leases \(Commercial and Retail\)*](#)

⁵ <https://www.legislation.act.gov.au/di/2020-267/>

[COVID-19 Emergency Response Declaration 2020 \(No 2\)](#)⁶ (Commercial Leases Declaration) will remain in place until there is no COVID-19 emergency or until 31 January 2021 whichever is the earliest.

The ACT Government continues to monitor the need to keep the Commercial Leases Declaration in place. This approach takes into account a range of factors including: the possible stepping back of restrictions for business over coming months; the future of the Commonwealth's JobKeeper wage subsidy and overall business health and sentiment in the ACT. The ACT Government will continue to take the views of the Commercial Tenancies Advisory Committee, an independent body established to, among other things, keep government informed on issues arising under the Commercial Leases Declaration. The legislative framework under which the Commercial Leases Declaration operates allows for a timely response should the Government consider that continued assistance for commercial tenants is required.

In relation to both residential and commercial leases, the ACT Government has extended:

- Land tax and rates relief for residential landlords who agree to reduce their tenants' rent by at least 25 per cent until 31 December 2020. The Government will match 50 per cent of the rent reduction to a maximum of \$1,300 per tax quarter (roughly \$100 per week).
- Commercial rates relief to property owners who agree to reduce rents for significantly impacted tenants (or if they are significantly impacted owner-operators) until 31 December 2020.

The Commissioner for ACT Revenue has also extended interest free deferrals of residential and commercial rates until 31 March 2021.

Recommendation 31

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government should direct stimulus investment towards social and public housing to address chronic community shortages of affordable housing.

Government Response

Agreed

The ACT Government has demonstrated a strong and long-standing commitment to investing in social and public housing and supporting vulnerable Canberrans to access safe, secure and appropriate accommodation. These values are reinforced through the policy

⁶ <https://www.legislation.act.gov.au/di/2020-283/>

mandate set by the ACT Housing Strategy (the strategy), and COVID-19 has not shifted this focus.

A range of complementary measures have been developed in response to COVID-19. These align with the strategy's goals and objectives and are being delivered through the ACT Government's Economic Stimulus through Social Housing package.

The package includes programs and initiatives that target sustained and equitable growth through increasing the supply of social and public housing, growing the community housing sector and diversifying the supply base. These include:

- Expanding the *Growing and Renewing Public Housing* program.
- Exploring options to expand the government's existing Shared Equity scheme to include a stream for community housing providers (CHPs),
- Further development a Land Rent Scheme for CHPs; and
- Developing a Build to Rent Scheme (which can be accessed by CHPs).

The Parliamentary and Governing Agreement for the 10th Legislative Assembly Australian Capital Territory provides a commitment to improve social housing and housing affordability over the next four years as part of the roadmap for increased supply of affordable housing, as outlined in the ACT Housing Strategy. This work will include but is not limited to working with land owners and community organisations; increasing emergency accommodation; expanding specialist homelessness services; constructing a built-to-rent affordable rental co-located with Common Ground Gungahlin and completing Common Ground Dickson; additional funding for systemic advocacy in the housing sector; and expanding land tax exemptions programs for affordable housing.

Recommendation 32

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government should invest in women's specialist homelessness services and culturally sensitive housing solutions for First Nations communities.

Government Response

Agreed.

During 2020, Mackillop House commenced operations to provide specialist homeless service for woman with or without children. The facility has capacity to house 20 single women and 6 women with up to three children at any one time. As of 31 October, MacKillop has accommodated 37 women with and without children.

The ACT Government also provides funding of \$6.3m specifically for Women's programs as well as a range of services that women fall under such as Families, Youth and general support.

All specialist homelessness service providers are required to conduct training in cultural awareness in providing their services

Under the ACT Housing Strategy (The strategy), the ACT Government has committed to addressing gaps in the service system and to supporting culturally appropriate housing options for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

These commitments are reflected in the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement along with the commitment to establish a community participation approach as a means to understand housing needs and requirements in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. CSD, in partnership with the Elected Body, is currently developing a scope of works to engage a consultant to develop a framework for a community participation approach.

The strategy reflects the ACT Government's commitment to increasing the supply of safe, secure and affordable housing across the ACT, and continued growth and diversification in the community housing sector.

Now in its second year of implementation, the strategy includes a range of targeted actions which respond to the needs of cohorts who are susceptible to housing crisis and financial stress including older women, young people, children and families. The strategy also recognises the importance of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to ensure that support programs and accommodation options are compatible with cultural customs and practices.

The ACT Government has also been working to deliver culturally appropriate public housing for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Following the success of the first culturally appropriate public housing complex for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in 2016, the ACT Government invested a further \$4.488 million to deliver 10 more dwellings for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans. Housing ACT is working closely with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body to deliver the second and third older persons complexes of five dwellings on each site. This work has continued throughout the design and community engagement process for the new complexes. The second complex is scheduled for completion in late November/early December 2020 with the third complex due for completion in late 2021.

Recommendation 33

The Committee recommends the ACT Government explore options to provide support and payments to young people who may not be able to pay rent and other housing related costs.

Government Response

Agreed.

The ACT Government continues to consider the need for further financial support for people significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, including young people.

Housing-related support measures currently being provided through the Government's economic survival and recovery packages include:

- land tax rebates for landlords of residential properties who reduce rents by at least 25 per cent for impacted tenants;
- an additional \$200 rebate for recipients of the Utilities Concession; and
- interest-free rates deferrals for owner occupiers experiencing hardship because of COVID-19.

A land tax exemption is also available to property owners who rent their property to a low income household through a registered community housing provider at less than 75 per cent of the market rent.

In August 2020, the Government announced a range of new support measures to assist young people, including:

- a six-month payroll tax exemption for businesses who pay wages for new employees who are apprentices or trainees;
- a \$2 million extension of the ACT Public Service graduate program to provide additional graduate positions over the next two years; and
- an additional \$250,000 for targeted mental health support for young people.

The ACT Government is providing emergency financial support for students through the Australian Red Cross. This support is helping students in financial distress due to COVID-19 who were ineligible for relief under Australian Government programs. This support is available to both domestic and international students.

Recommendation 34

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government undertake an investigation into the circumstances regarding the difficulties encountered in facilitating support and housing for a mother and her seven children from interstate, as outlined by Beryl Women Inc. in evidence given to the Committee.

Government Response**Noted.**

Housing ACT investigated this matter seeking information from several services including DVCS. A workshop with the Woman's Sector to consider new draft guidelines for people coming from interstate occurred on 16 November 2020.

Recommendation 35

The Committee recommends that the Select Committee for the COVID-19 Pandemic Response continue and, if necessary be re-established, for the length of the declared COVID Emergency.

Government Response

This is a matter for decision by the ACT Legislative Assembly.

Recommendation 36

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government conduct a full review and assessment of the operation of the COVID-19 Emergency including, but not limited to, governance, decision making, preparedness, cross-border issues, intergovernmental cooperation, and lessons for the future.

Government Response**Noted.**

The ACT Government is focussed on continuous improvement and regularly considers how the ACT is responding to COVID-19.

The ACT Government also works through National Cabinet and the National Coordination Mechanism to understand other jurisdictions' approaches to the COVID-19 pandemic and incorporate lessons learned and successful elements into the ACT's response.

Recommendation 37

The Committee recommends that future committees of the ACT Legislative Assembly adopt virtual meetings as a standard part of their operations.

Government Response

This is a matter for decision by the ACT Legislative Assembly.

Recommendation 38

The Committee recommends that future committees of the ACT Legislative Assembly consider providing interim reports so that there can be more timely Government responses.

Government Response

This is a matter for decision by the ACT Legislative Assembly.

Recommendation 39

The Committee recommends that future Assemblies of the ACT Legislative Assembly consider establishing specific committees for inquiries into matters that encompass extensive cross portfolio issues.

Government Response

This is a matter for decision by the ACT Legislative Assembly.

Recommendation 40

The Committee recommends that future Assemblies of the ACT Legislative Assembly utilise electronic systems, such as collaborative platforms, to easily collate, and collaborate on written recommendations for reports.

Government Response

This is a matter for decision by the ACT Legislative Assembly.

APPENDIX A – Previous Government Responses

Rec No.	Recommendation	Government response	Updates from the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement – 10 th Legislative Assembly Australian Capital Territory
Interim Report 1			
1.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government prepare and publish a step-by-step process for easing restrictions in the Territory along the lines of the one prepared by the Northern Territory Government.	Agreed	
2.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government remove the current 100-property limit on the land tax concession scheme for landlords, who rent their properties through a community housing provider at an affordable rent to low and moderate income tenants, and make this scheme permanent.	Noted	The ACT Labor and Greens Government will expand further the existing land tax exemption program for affordable housing by increasing the cap to 250 and removing the time limit for this exemption.
3.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government contact all landlords and tenants that have had their email details recorded when a bond was lodged to inform them of the supports available for renters and landlords alike.	Agreed	
4.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government create and make available a standard terms and rights document for tenants and landlords to assist them in understanding changes due to COVID-19.	Agreed	
5.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government establish a tenant transfer system to allow for easier and more convenient change of tenants and retrieval of bonds for members of group houses.	Agreed in principle	
6.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government develop a framework for the repayment of any rental arrears accrued during the COVID-19 eviction moratorium.	Noted	
7.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government develop a plan to prohibit a lessor or grantor from seeking termination solely on the basis of rent arrears accrued during the period covered by the Residential Tenancies (COVID-19 Emergency Response) Declaration 2020.	Noted	

Appendix A

Rec No.	Recommendation	Government response	Updates from the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement – 10 th Legislative Assembly Australian Capital Territory
8.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government explore a method for renters in fixed-term leases to terminate their tenancies during the COVID-19 emergency, such as by using the same mechanism available to people on periodic tenancies, i.e. by providing three weeks' notice.	Noted	
9.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider providing financial mechanisms to assist community housing providers in expanding their property holdings to provide accommodation for people eligible for community housing.	Noted	
10.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government make all necessary representations to the Commonwealth to assist community service organisations to obtain COVID-19 funding.	Agreed	
11.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider establishing a small infrastructure grants program to assist community organisations who may need extra support to help deliver services in response to COVID-19.	Agreed	
12.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensure that disability service providers, aged care homes and similar service providers have adequate supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect and reassure both clients and staff.	Agreed	
13.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide funding to enable service providers to shift to on-line delivery of services where possible.	Agreed	
14.	The Committee recommends that OneLink expand its opening hours so that it is available later at night and on weekends.	Noted	
15.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government fund and participate in a Connections Week exercise at least twice a year to connect with rough sleepers and other people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness and understand who they are and their individual circumstances and needs.	Agreed in principle	The ACT Labour and Greens Government has committed to expanding specialist homelessness service capacity (\$18 million over four years).
16.	The Committee recommends the ACT Government prioritise the city centre as the next location for a COVID-19 testing facility, if testing facilities are expanded.	Noted	
17.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government report regularly to the	Noted	

Appendix A

Rec No.	Recommendation	Government response	Updates from the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement – 10 th Legislative Assembly Australian Capital Territory
	Legislative Assembly, and the Garran community, on any alternative uses proposed for the pop-up Emergency Department while it is on Garran Oval.		
18.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government prepare plans for the future use of the pop-up emergency building once it is removed from Garran Oval.	Noted	
19.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government require that hospitality workers undertake hygiene training specific to COVID-19.	Noted	
20.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government prepare rules for the reopening of cafes, restaurants and other venues such as provision of hand sanitiser, distancing between tables, and cleaning of premises.	Agreed	
21.	The Committee recommends that specific and targeted information is provided to patrons to ensure that social distancing measures are adhered to and highlighting the responsibility of each and every person.	Agreed	
22.	The Committee recommends the ACT Government continues to work with the hospitality and club sector on occupancy arrangements, informed by up to date health advice, particularly with a view to reopening venues and increasing employment in the sector.	Agreed	
23.	The Committee recommends the ACT Government give consideration as to whether the national and cultural institutions in the ACT could have a relevant patron limit set for them, informed by up to date health advice, particularly with a view to aiding tourism.	Agreed	
24.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government develop and communicate the criteria and process for applying for commercial rates waivers due to COVID-19 pandemic impacts.	Agreed	
Interim Report 2			
1.	The Committee recommends the ACT Government direct that all delegated legislation made in response to COVID-19 (including notifiable instruments) include a statement of compatibility outlining whether and how the instrument is	Agreed in principle	

Appendix A

Rec No.	Recommendation	Government response	Updates from the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement – 10 th Legislative Assembly Australian Capital Territory
	compatible with human rights.		
2.	The Committee recommends that where emergency measures are introduced by way of delegated legislation, they should be accompanied by a statement of compatibility with human rights.	Noted	
3.	The Committee recommends that delegated legislation made in response to COVID-19 be in the form of disallowable instruments, rather than notifiable instruments to ensure appropriate and adequate oversight by the Legislative Assembly.	Noted	
4.	The Committee recommends that ACT Policing make public all guidance or directions it has provided to officers to inform their enforcement of public health directions to enable assessment of whether such guidance is sufficient, updated and accurate while also establishing clear community expectations about compliance.	Noted	
5.	The Committee recommends that ACT Policing, ACT Health and Access Canberra publish weekly de-identified data about compliance activities taken under any public health emergency directions, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the number of infringement notices or formal cautions issued; • the number of compliance checks conducted; and • basic socio-demographic indicators of affected individuals or businesses. 	Noted	
6.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • put in place additional controls and procedures to ensure that only approved employees or personnel may access data in the National COVIDSafe data store and may do so solely for the purpose of contact tracing; or • if the ACT Government believes that data agreements signed with the Commonwealth containing rules governing their usage of COVID app data are legally enforceable, publicly release those agreements. 	Noted	
7.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensures that information is specifically adapted to help children and young people understand COVID-19, what is required of them and where they can access support if needed.	Agreed	

Appendix A

Rec No.	Recommendation	Government response	Updates from the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement – 10 th Legislative Assembly Australian Capital Territory
8.	The Committee recommends that, to enable timely communication when there are exceptional circumstances, the Directorate suspends its usual protocol of not communicating with teachers and school staff out of normal work hours.	Agreed in principle	
9.	The Committee recommends that if there are further restrictions on face to face schooling that the ACT Government prioritise facilitating normal schooling for children with special needs.	Agreed in principle	
10.	The Committee recommends that further work be undertaken to support students with special needs, including those in learning support units or with an Individual Learning Plan (ILP), during shut downs.	Agreed	
11.	The Committee recommends that all school systems provide extra support to students who may have been left behind by the changes in education, and in particular those who were struggling before the emergency.	Noted	
12.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government undertake an independent review of the learning from home period so that improvements can be made for similar future situations. The scope should include but not be limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • preparedness for remote learning; • resources available for schools and families, including consideration of identification of vulnerable children and additional supports provided; • communication with school communities and parents; and • comparison of differences with the responses in other jurisdictions. 	Agreed in principle	
13.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government undertake an independent longitudinal study to measure the impact of the COVID-19 response on children's education.	Noted	
14.	The Committee recommends that, wherever possible, students have access to their local school during any similar shutdowns.	Agreed in principle	
15.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government publish the scope of the Coordinator-General's role.	Agreed	

Rec No.	Recommendation	Government response	Updates from the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement – 10 th Legislative Assembly Australian Capital Territory
Interim Report 3			
1.	The Committee recommends that the Minister for Mental Health report at each remaining sitting of the Ninth Assembly on the occupancy rate for acute mental health beds.	Noted	
2.	The Committee recommends that the Minister for Health at each remaining sitting of the Ninth Assembly, update the Assembly and the community on the backlog of elective surgery, including a breakdown by specialty and how the government intends to clear the backlog.	Noted	
3.	The Committee recommends that the Minister for Health at each remaining sitting of the Ninth Assembly, update the Assembly and the community on any backlog in access to specialty clinics and outpatient services, including a breakdown by specialty, and how the government intends to clear the backlog.	Noted	
4.	The Committee recommends that ACT health, in conjunction with health and disability organisations, provide information for GPs and other health workers about how to prevent infection with in-home workers and the importance of support for disabled people.	Agreed	
5.	The Committee recommends that any further directions issued by the ACT Government be clearer about what aspects of a venue fall within the floor space that determines how many patrons can be in a space in a venue.	Agreed in principle	
6.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider whether guidelines for venues are better contained within directions/determinations rather than existing separately.	Noted	
7.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government publish the AHPPC advice that states that gaming venues should not open until stage 3.	Agreed in part	
8.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide some concession, such as rent relief for ACT Government premises, to the organisers of Live in Ya Lounge.	Agreed	

Appendix A

Rec No.	Recommendation	Government response	Updates from the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement – 10 th Legislative Assembly Australian Capital Territory
9.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government create a library of arts equipment for use by the arts sector.	Noted	
10.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government create guidelines for managers and staff regarding working from home arrangements and transitional arrangements for return to office-based work.	Agreed	
11.	<p>The Committee recommends that the ACT Government make it a priority to publish an action plan to support the ACT COVID-19 Disability Strategy, as required by that strategy, and that that plan include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • specific information for people with disabilities, families, carers and support workers so that people with disabilities can participate in society in accordance with social distancing rules; • clear information to people with a disability and their carers about what the process is to access and acquire PPE; • provision for an ACT COVID-19 Disability Hotline; and • a way to operationalize the Territory role in the Management and Operational Plan for People with Disability. 	Agreed in part	
12.	The Committee recommends that the ACT government establish a small fund to be administered by CarersACT to provide effective respite for carers aimed at rebuilding their capacity following this extended period of stress.	Noted	
13.	The Committee recommends that the ACT government make representations to the Commonwealth supporting the conversion of NDIS advance payments for COVID-19 related expenses into a grant.	Agreed in principle	
14.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government revise its clinical guidelines in order to reassure people with a disability that they will continue to have access to health care, including emergency and critical health care, on the basis of equality with others and based on objective and non-discriminatory clinical criteria.	Agreed	

Appendix A

Rec No.	Recommendation	Government response	Updates from the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement – 10 th Legislative Assembly Australian Capital Territory
15.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government ensures that any ethical decision making framework is designed with close consultation and active involvement of people with a disability and their representative organisations.	Agreed	
16.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider and act on the recommendations in the letter from Legal Aid appended to this report.	Agreed in principle	
17.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government continue to lower and/or remove stamp duty where possible as a lever to encourage housing sales.	Agreed	
18.	The Committee recommends that the ACT Government continue to review how to make the DA process more efficient, without compromising planning outcomes.	Agreed	The ACT Labor and Greens Government will improve and simplify the ACT's planning system including by completing the current planning review, in consultation with Canberrans, to deliver a planning system that is clear, easy to use and provides improved spatial and built outcomes across the Territory.
19.	The Committee recommends that the Minister for Planning and Land Management publish the number of lease variations issued in 2019-20 broken down by month and the value of revenue and waivers for these variations.	Agreed	
20.	The Committee recommends that the Suburban Land Agency publish a list of all available residential blocks that would be suitable for purchase under the HomeBuilder program.	Noted	
21.	The Committee recommends that, given that the ACT Budget was delayed and there has not been a financial update since the March Quarter 2020 Consolidated Financial Report, the ACT Government publish the actual financial reports or estimated outcomes for the 2019-20 year in July.	Noted	



ACT
Government

**Canberra Health
Services**

<patient name>
<patient address>
<patient address>
<patient address>

Dear <patient name>

Pre-Surgery COVID-19 Screening

As you may be aware, our health services are enhancing screening processes to keep staff, patients and their loved ones safe from COVID-19. A new digital screening tool is available to make it easier to determine if it is safe for someone to enter a health facility.

ACT health facilities have commenced screening of all staff, patients and visitors. This process allows for a coordinated and uniform approach across the Territory and is in line with the tightening of visitor restrictions as of Monday, 13 July 2020.

You must complete the screening tool before entering a health facility in the ACT **on the day of surgery**. It involves answering a series of simple questions. A green tick or a red cross will determine whether or not it is safe to enter the hospital. You will need to show your results to the screening staff at each of the main entrances.

To access the online screening simply:

- Scan the QR code on the health screening posters as you near the main entrances
or
- Fill in your details online at the ACT website screening.covid19@act.gov.au.
or
- Complete the hardcopy form attached to this letter upon arrival

If you do receive an **X** through the screening tool then you must:

- Remain at home, **do not enter the hospital** for your planned surgery and notify Surgical Bookings(02) 5124 3514
- Access COVID testing, even if you do not display symptoms

We greatly appreciate you taking this opportunity to become familiar with the screening tool prior to being scheduled for you elective surgical procedure. A copy of the screening form is contained within this letter

Should you require any additional information, please refer to the COVID-19 ACT Government website or alternatively contact the Territory Wide Surgical Services Team on (02) 51249889. Staff within this team will be able to provide you with advice regarding your waiting time for elective surgery.

Yours sincerely



Dave Peffer
Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Canberra Health Services

7 August 2020



ACT HEALTH FACILITIES SCREENING

The top priority of healthcare services in the ACT is keeping our staff and patients safe.

This screening tool is used to decide if it is safe for you to enter the health facility today.

Everyone entering this building needs to answer the following screening questions. If you need help filling this out, please talk to a staff member at the entrance. If you want to speak to someone in a language other than English about this form please telephone the Telephone Interpreter Service on 131 450.

Date: / / 20 Time: _____ am / pm

Your Details

I am:	<input type="checkbox"/> A staff / student	Surname _____
	<input type="checkbox"/> A visitor	First Name _____
	<input type="checkbox"/> A patient	Phone Number _____
	<input type="checkbox"/> A contractor	Hospital/Facility visiting: _____
	<input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer	Area visiting/working: _____

Screening Questions

Symptoms: In the past 24 hours have you had any new onset of the following symptoms, even if mild:

YES	<input type="checkbox"/> Fever, chills, or night sweats	<input type="checkbox"/> Loss of taste
	<input type="checkbox"/> Cough	<input type="checkbox"/> Any other COVID symptoms: sore throat, fatigue, runny nose, muscle pain, joint pain, diarrhoea, nausea/vomiting, loss of appetite
	<input type="checkbox"/> Shortness of breath	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Loss of smell	
NO	<input type="checkbox"/> None of the above	

Travel: *Have you:*

YES	<input type="checkbox"/> Knowingly been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the past 14 days? (except for staff working with known or suspect COVID-19 positive patients)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Returned from overseas or a cruise ship in the last 14 days?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Returned from or were in the State of Victoria in the last 14 days?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Returned from or were in specific Sydney LGAs in the last 14 days? (see overleaf for the full Local Government Areas list)
NO	<input type="checkbox"/> None of the above

**If you ticked YES to any of the above, please turn overleaf for further information.
If you ticked NO you may enter the health facility.**

ACT Health is collecting this information for use to screen entry of all individuals seeking to enter health facilities in the ACT and if required, for contact tracing purposes. ACT Health will not use or disclose your information for any other purpose (unless it is required by or authorised under law to do so).



Canberra Health Services



John James Hospital



Public Hospital Bruce



Bruce Private Hospital



BARTON PRIVATE HOSPITAL
ON SYDNEY AVENUE



Canberra Private Hospital



nexus

If you ticked YES to any of the screening questions, you cannot enter the health facility today. You will need to do the following:

- **Staff / Contractor / Volunteer / Student:** You cannot go into work today, please contact your manager. If you have even the mildest of COVID-19 symptoms, you should get tested and isolate at home until you get your result.
- **Visitor:** If you need assistance to contact your loved ones, please speak with the relevant clinical area. If you have even the mildest of COVID-19 symptoms, you should get tested and self-isolate until you get your result.
- **Patient:** You need to discuss your personal circumstances with the relevant clinical area you are attending. If you have even the mildest of COVID-19 symptoms, it is important that you discuss this with clinical staff so a decision can be made about whether you go to your appointment in person or if a telehealth appointment will be organised.

If you have been denied entry into the health facility and would like to apply for an exemption:

- **Staff / Contractor / Volunteer / Student:** Please contact your employer/manager and discuss this with them in the first instance. They will escalate it to the relevant Executive Director for consideration.
- **Visitor:**
 - If you have been in specific Sydney LGAs in the last 14 days, then please contact the health facility directly to apply for an exemption.
 - If you have been overseas or in Victoria in the last 14 days, you will need to seek an exemption through ACT Health and fill in the online form at covid19.act.gov.au/exemption-application.

If you require immediate medical assistance please call 000 or proceed directly to the nearest Emergency Department.

Local Government Areas in Sydney

Campbelltown City

Liverpool City

Parramatta City

ACT Health is collecting this information for use to screen entry of all individuals seeking to enter health facilities in the ACT and if required, for contact tracing purposes. ACT Health will not use or disclose your information for any other purpose (unless it is required by or authorised under law to do so).



Canberra Health
Services



John James
Hospital



Public Hospital Bruce



Bruce Private Hospital

