

2021

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

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO RESOLUTION OF THE ASSEMBLY 13
MAY 2021 CANBERRA INDIAN-AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY SUPPORT**

**Presented by
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Ministerial for Multicultural Affairs
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Government Response to Assembly Resolution 13 May 2021 – Canberra Indian-Australian Community

The ACT Government acknowledges the serious COVID-19 situation in India and South Asia as well as the profound loss and grief being experienced in those regions and in Indian and South Asian communities in Australia. The distress and hardship being experienced by Indian-Australians in the ACT is also acknowledged. The Indian community contributes to a rich multicultural way of life in the ACT and a strong, close and long-standing relationship has been forged between our nations across areas including trade, defence, culture and education.

On 27 April 2021, in response to escalating cases of the COVID-19 Delta variant in India, the Commonwealth Minister for Health announced a temporary pause on direct flights from India for two weeks to 15 May 2021. At the time of the pause, India was reporting more than 300,000 new cases of COVID-19 daily. The pause took effect via an emergency determination under the *Biosecurity Act 2015* and was lifted on 15 May enabling the resumption of repatriation flights from India.

This measure aimed to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spreading to Australia via international travel, in addition to existing travel restrictions, screening of travellers arriving in Australia and quarantine requirements on arrival. But it also resulted in significant distress and hardship for Indian-Australians in the ACT, many of which have family in India and South Asia.

On 13 May 2021, the Legislative Assembly passed a motion to support the Canberra Indian-Australian community. The Assembly resolution called on the ACT Government to:

- a) provide information to the Indian and South Asian communities in Canberra regarding who they can contact for advice and support on ACT Government Services, including where to access counselling services;
- b) consider, along with state and federal counterparts, what medical supplies and assistance can be provided to health workers in South Asia;
- c) continue to work with the Indian and South Asian communities in Canberra to provide support as this changing situation evolves; and
- d) provide an update back to the Assembly on the outcomes of this consultation and subsequent action at an appropriate time.

The ACT Government agrees to this resolution and is well positioned to implement it. The ACT Government is committed to continuing to work with stakeholders in providing information and support to the ACT Canberra Indian and South Asian communities.

The Community Services Directorate (CSD) working in partnership with community organisations including Legal AID ACT, Multicultural Hub (M-Hub), Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services (MARSS) and the Red Cross, is reaching out to the Indian-Australian community to provide support whether it is legal, financial, wellbeing or food and housing.

Through these partnerships, the ACT Government supports, and will continue to support Canberra's impacted by the situation in India and ensure everyone is able to access the support services they need.

A Community Support Grant of \$5,000 has been made available to the India Australia Association of Canberra to support the organisation to deliver community building and resilience events in response to the changing COVID-19 situation. The funding has supported events that aim to bring people together to build community spirit and to show solidarity for those affected by COVID-19 in India. The events have raised additional funds from the Canberra community to make a donation to the PM CARES Fund (a dedicated assistance and relief fund for foreign donations) to address growing anxiety and concern in the ACT Indian community, as well the wider community around COVID-19 case numbers, deaths and lack of supplies in India.

CSD also provides a range of services and programs to support people, including Indian and South Asian communities through COVID-19. Services include financial and counselling support through multicultural community partners including M-Hub, MARSS and the Australian Red Cross. Information on services and support are also available through the Office for Multicultural Affairs webpage and E-Newsletter. A range of translated materials are also available on the ACT COVID-19 website (<https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/community/translated-resources>).

The pandemic has placed stress on health systems globally including in Australia's foreign neighbouring countries. The Australian Government is working to provide essential aid, supported by State and Territory governments, where requested. International assistance of this nature is coordinated through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Department of Health, and other relevant Commonwealth-led areas.

International disaster support is centrally coordinated by the Australian Government and guided by the Australian Government Overseas Assistance Plan 2018 (AUSASSIST) or the Australian Government Disaster Response Plan 2020 (COMDISPLAN) to ensure consistency with Australia's international aid programs, the Australian Medical Assistance Teams (AUSMAT), and similar programs.

Under Commonwealth activated plans such as AUSASSIST or COMDISPLAN, individual jurisdictions may be asked for physical or human resources to assist where practicable. The ACT Government would consider any such request made by the Australian Government and provide support within its capacity, such as release and deployment of relevant personnel in support of operations under these plans.

The Government acknowledges the trauma being experienced and the resilience of the ACT Indian and South Asian communities. The Government will continue to work with multicultural community partners and consult the Multicultural Advisory Council, the Refugee Asylum Seeker Humanitarian Coordination Committee and individual community leaders to support the Canberra Indian-Australian community throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.