



Inquiry into Appropriation Bill 2025–2026 and Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2025–2026

Answer to question on notice

Asked by: Mr Thomas Emerson MLA

Addressed to: Treasurer

Redirected to: Attorney-General

Reference: CMTEDD: Treasury - Budget Outlook

Hearing: 07/08/2025

In relation to: Cancellation of Rent Relief Fund

Question received: 12/08/2025

Answer Due: 22/08/2025

ACT Shelter, ACTCOSS, Care and other community organisations had called for the continuation of the Rent Relief Fund through the 2025-26 ACT Budget consultation process. A joint budget submission from 17 community organisations included two providers of tenancy support services who highlighted the ongoing value of the Rent Relief Fund to their clients.

During the Estimates community day hearings on 22 July, Care told the Committee that they had noted that the Rent Relief Fund was one of their key budget priorities when they met with the Government in January. Subsequent meeting requests via letters from Care and other community organisations to various Government ministers to discuss the Rent Relief Fund ahead of the 2025-26 ACT Budget were not accepted.

(1) Given the community sector's clear concern about the loss of the Rent Relief Fund, why was there no further engagement with service providers about the impact the scheme's closure would have and is now having on these services and their clients.

(2) Has the Government considered the impact of cancelling the Rent Relief Fund on the Budget's forward estimates.

(3) Is the Treasurer or another minister open to meeting with these organisations before the Assembly returns in September to finalise the 2025-26 Appropriation Bill.

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Dr Marisa Paterson MLA: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) In February 2025, Care Financial made a submission into the 2025/2026 budget requesting fundings for six priorities in the 2025/2026 financial year. The Rent Relief Fund was one of these six listed priorities. This is a mechanism for many organisations and community stakeholders to put forward their arguments for initiatives of importance in the ACT community, as part of the annual budget process.

On 30 May 2025, the ACT Treasurer, Chris Steel MLA, and Attorney-General, Tara Cheyne MLA jointly responded to a letter from Care and Woden Community Service to confirm that the Rent Relief Fund provided targeted, short-term rental emergency support. The letter confirmed that the Rent Relief Fund was extended in the 2024-2025 to respond to prevalent market conditions and cost-of-living pressures.

In early June 2025, the Justice and Community Safety Directorate (JACS) met with Care CEO Carmel Franklin to discuss how to manage the end of the Rent Relief Fund. Stakeholder expectations about the fund were discussed, as well as when Care would stop accepting new applications, to guard against oversubscription. Following this meeting, Care indicated publicly that it would stop accepting new applications after 4 July 2025.

In August 2025, ahead of a community stakeholder roundtable on the Rent Relief Fund, JACS met with Care to discuss the finalisation of the Rent Relief Fund, how the program might be evaluated, and the demand for the Rent Relief Fund or similar supports in the community.

(2) The Rent Relief Fund was a temporarily funded cost of living support measure introduced following the COVID-19 pandemic. However, recognising the cost-of-living pressures on Canberrans, the ACT Government committed to further funding of the Rent Relief Fund in the 2023/2024 and 2024/2025 budgets. That funding is now exhausted. There has been ongoing engagement with service providers about the scheme's impact and Care provides the government with ongoing qualitative data on the positive short-term impacts to grant recipients. Care also continues to provide invaluable support to Canberrans in the form of financial counselling and referrals to other supports including the Mobile Debt Clinic.

Care has also provided quantitative data on the demographics of applicants to the ACT Government with a final report on the Rent Relief Fund to be provided by Care shortly. The government is continuing to monitor the impacts of the scheme on the community and frontline services, and has met with relevant stakeholders to discuss impacts.

As part of budget considerations, the ACT Government considered a range of cost-of-living priorities, housing investment and spending decisions. A number of measures are in place to support renters in relation to cost-of-living and rental stress as outlined on the ACT Government website at [Renting - ACT Government](#). These include help finding an affordable rental, interest-free loans to pay bonds, free home energy checks, help reducing running costs and minimum standards for ceiling insulation in rental properties.

The ACT Government has also allocated \$262,142 to the Mobile Debt Clinic in the 2025/2026 Budget. This service provides a mobile consumer credit legal advice service for people impacted by domestic and family violence, financial abuse, mental ill health, or any other disadvantage. The

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Mobile Debt Clinic was listed as one of the six funding priorities in Care's February 2025 submission to the 2025/2026 Budget.

The Government also announced the following cost-of-living initiatives and supports in the 2025/2026 budget:

- permanently increasing the Electricity, Gas and Water Rebate to \$800 to eligible recipients (around 40,000 households) in 2025-26;
- providing a one-off payment of \$250 to all ACT apprentices and trainees working in the ACT and an additional \$250 to first-year apprentice and trainees;
- a \$150 registration fee reduction for light trailers weighing 4.5 tonnes or less;
- increasing stamp duty concessions for first home buyers, pensioners, and people with disability;
- establishing a Food Bank Fund to support Canberrans facing financial stress and food insecurity; and
- packages of essential items worth \$200 to first-time mothers in vulnerable households and other families identified as needing support.

(3) A Rent Relief Fund Roundtable was held on 20 August 2025 and involved relevant Ministers, advisers, public servants and community sector representatives, to discuss the rent relief fund and explore areas of community need in the private rental market and how that might best be addressed.

The Roundtable was attended by Dr Marisa Paterson MLA, Acting Attorney-General; Yvette Berry MLA, Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Homes and New Suburbs, political advisers, Treasury and JACS officials, and representatives from Care, ACTCOSS, St Vincent de Paul Canberra/Goulburn, ACT Shelter, Canberra Community Law, The Salvation Army, St John's Care, CIT Student Association, Legal Aid ACT, The Salvation Army and Woden Community Service.

Approved for circulation to the Select Committee on Estimates 2025–2026

Signature: 

Date: 01/09/2025

By the Acting Attorney-General, Dr Marisa Paterson MLA