

COVID-19 support for Canberrans facing homelessness or domestic and family violence

Released 20/04/2020 - Joint media release

Today the ACT Government announced the details of \$3 million in funding to provide support for people facing homelessness or domestic and family violence arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The funding will allow the specialist homelessness sector and domestic and family violence services to expand their operational capacity and relieve the pressure of additional need during COVID-19 and throughout winter.

Deputy Chief Minister, Yvette Berry said, "The ACT Government has been working with these specialist service providers to understand how we can help them to continue operations during the pandemic, including through assisting staff to work remotely and adapt face to face services.

"The government is providing significant extra funding to increase the available temporary accommodation, expand service capacity to house rough sleepers and enable services to meet increased need from the Canberra community.

"The ACT is well placed to respond to the additional impacts of the virus in our community as well as the usual peaks in need seen during the winter. The ACT Government will continue to work with the sector to plan and prepare for the impact of COVID-19 on our most vulnerable community members.

"This package will provide immediate financial support that will be complemented by Commonwealth funding for responding to family violence, which will be announced in the coming weeks," Minister Berry said.

The ACT Government's funding will target the following supports:

Client Support – \$330,000 for OneLink to expand existing operations in response to increased demand on the homelessness services sector. All specialist homelessness service providers across the ACT can access this funding to support current and new clients who are at risk of homelessness due to COVID-19.

Accommodation Support – \$832,000 to provide both emergency and long-term accommodation for men, women and children who face the challenge of physical distancing in shelters, self-isolation when needed and potential quarantine, including:

- \$100,000 for CatholicCare to fast track the Axial Housing pilot as the preferred and primary option to house rough sleepers during COVID-19. Based on Housing First principles, the program provides housing solutions that include the wrap-around supports needed to sustain a tenancy and not result in exits to homelessness after COVID-19. The program will continue to focus on housing Canberra's entrenched rough sleepers.

- \$127,000 to upgrade and operate temporary accommodation at The Lodge run by Argyle Housing for men experiencing homelessness during COVID-19.
- \$150,000 for CatholicCare to establish and operate Mackillop House to respond to the growing need for safe supported housing for women and children who are experiencing homelessness during COVID-19.
- \$150,000 for OneLink to increase its existing 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.
- \$305,000 to furnish and upgrade existing public housing to be made available as crisis and shelter accommodation.

Responding to domestic and family violence – \$550,000 to respond to an increase in demand for domestic and family violence and sexual assault services and provide emergency accommodation to women, children and families experiencing domestic and family violence, including:

- \$125,000 to boost Safer Families Assistance grants that help cover expenses associated with sustaining or re-establishing a family home. This could include mortgage or rental payments, furnishing, legal services and any other expenses.
- \$350,000 to the Domestic Violence Crisis Service to enhance direct crisis support for women, children and families impacted by domestic and family violence, including emergency accommodation.
- \$75,000 to the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre to assist supports for Canberrans impacted by sexual violence.

All community sector service providers will have access to grant funding to assist them meet the challenges that COVID-19 creates for continued delivery of their vital services, for example, video conferencing software or plexiglass screens.

Provider Support Fund – \$1 million in grant funding to support community services organisations adapt and adopt to innovative and essential business changes, including staff safety fixtures and technology requirements to continue operations remotely. The Community Services Directorate will communicate with providers about eligibility and detail on how to access these grants.

Minister for Community Services and Facilities, Suzanne Orr said, "Our partners in the community service sector provide essential support to many members of our community. In a situation such as this, these services are more important than ever.

"The Community Services Directorate has been working tirelessly with our community partners to ensure continuance of service, as well as identifying key areas that have been hit particularly hard by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Frontline workers need our support and this package will go a long way to ensuring that they have the resources they need to help our community through this ongoing situation," Minister Orr said.

The government's homelessness and domestic and family violence response package is in addition to the one-off \$250 payment to all social housing tenants, full rent relief for six months for community housing providers and \$1.5 million for the Canberra Relief Network.

- Statement ends -

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