

## FACT SHEET – OTHER SUPPORTS AVAILABLE

On 20 April 2020, the ACT Government announced \$3 million in funding to support people facing homelessness or domestic and family violence arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to the fund several other COVID-19-related support packages are available to the community services sector. A list of some supports are below and service providers are encouraged to continue to share resources within the sector as events unfold.

### Canberra Relief Network

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The Canberra Relief Network has been established in response to the community's increasing demand for food and non-perishable essential items, following the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The CRN consists of established emergency food relief providers along with other social and community welfare organisations that have joined specifically to support CRN during this public health emergency.

The CRN has the capacity to support others impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic: casual workers, international students, including those isolated due to COVID-19 infection, carers of individuals with COVID-19, disability, health challenges or chronic illnesses

### Rent relief for properties under the Housing Asset Assistance Program

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On 2 April 2020, the ACT Government announced a \$214 million Economic Survival package to support hospitals, local businesses and households during the COVID-19 health crisis. Included in the support package was support for the community sector experiencing the financial impact of COVID-19.

#### [Questions and Answers about the rent relief for properties rented under Housing ACT's Housing Asset Assistance Program \(HAAP\)](#)

#### **Under the package, what financial assistance is available for organisations that rent properties from Housing ACT's Housing Asset Assistance Program (HAAP)?**

For six months from 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2020, organisations that rent properties from Housing ACT under the Housing Asset Assistance Program will receive full rent relief. This means that the ACT Government will not charge rent for those properties that six-month period.

#### **What is the rent relief for?**

The rent relief is intended to provide direct financial support for organisations to continue to focus on providing essential services and provide flexibility around how they work with their tenants, particularly those who have lost income as a result of COVID-19.

#### **Do organisations need to pass on the rent relief to their tenants?**

This rent relief is designed to give organisations the ability, where appropriate, to support tenants who have lost their income as a result of COVID-19 and are temporarily unable to meet their rental obligations. It is not intended that rent relief should be passed on uniformly to all tenants and tenants who can maintain their rent payments should continue to do so.

## **Are organisations expected to pass on the rent relief to tenants who receive Centrelink support?**

The organisation can determine this on a case-by-case basis. Tenants who receive Centrelink benefits due to loss of income during COVID-19, but can maintain their rent payments, should continue to do so.

## **What happens if an organisation has paid rent upfront or if the rent is taken out as a direct debit?**

Housing ACT has cancelled direct debits until 30 September 2020.

For organisations that have paid their rent upfront or for direct debits that have been processed for this period, Housing ACT is working to identify and issue refunds as soon as possible.

If organisations pay rent manually, they will need to cancel their scheduled payments to 30 September 2020.

If an organisation has paid rent that is due between 1 April 2020 and 30 September 2020 and they are not contacted by Housing ACT in the next few weeks, they should contact their Housing ACT relationship provider to arrange a refund.

## **Do organisations need to pay back this rent after the six-month period ends?**

No, as the support is a rent relief, not a rent freeze. There is no expectation that organisations will need to pay back any rent payments due between 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2020.

## **If organisations pass on the rent relief to tenants, can they seek reimbursement from the tenant after the six-month period ends?**

Organisations can determine on a case-by-case basis how they use their rent relief to support their delivery of essential services during COVID-19. There is no expectation that any recipient of the rent relief as part of this package, be they the organisation or a tenant, repay the rent.

## **Will organisations have to report how they use the rent relief?**

There are no additional reporting requirements about how organisations use the rent relief to support the delivery of essential services during COVID-19. To improve policy delivery and to continue to support the community sector, Housing ACT will seek feedback from organisations about how the funds were able to support their delivery of essential services and provide support to tenants during COVID-19.

## **Where can organisations get more information?**

Housing ACT will soon invite organisations under the Housing ACT Housing Assistance Asset Program to participate in a monthly working group. The purpose of the working group will be to promote collaboration among the sector as we work through the health crisis as a community.

## **Bank payment to public housing tenants**

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On 20 March, the ACT Government announced that a one-off \$250 payment will be made to all social housing households to relieve some of the financial pressure that may be felt by those most vulnerable in our community during this time.

This includes both public housing and community housing households that pay rent based on their income. This initiative is in addition to the Australian Government's one-off payment of \$750 to social security, veteran and other income support recipients and eligible concession card holders.

Housing ACT is currently making contact with each eligible household to check on their wellbeing and provide information on the one-off \$250 payment.

## Distribution of PPE

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The ACT Government acknowledges the important role the community sector plays in supporting and maintaining the wellbeing of individuals and families in the ACT. The health and wellbeing of community sector staff and clients is paramount and part of the of the ACT Government's Community Support Package is dedicated specifically to PPE supply for non-government community services. Community sector organisations can apply for PPE through completion of an online request form at [PPE Request Form](#).

Eligibility for requesting PPE is restricted to non-government community services and allied health services. Due to supply limitations, requests for PPE will be prioritised based on current advice from the Chief Health Officer and ACT Health, and the demonstrated need for PPE as outlined through an online request. Agencies who can access PPE through the National Medical stockpile are encouraged to do so.

Any questions or enquiries about PPE can be sent to the Community Services Directorate at [CSDPPE@act.gov.au](mailto:CSDPPE@act.gov.au).

## Telstra Top-Up Program

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The [Telstra Top-up program](#) provides a complimentary \$40 mobile credit recharge to those who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, family violence or impacted by natural disaster.

Any client of these eligible providers who is impacted by homelessness, family violence or natural disaster can access the free recharge, provided they are a Telstra pre-paid mobile phone customer.

Given the financial impact of COVID-19 on Australia's most vulnerable people, Telstra have increased the recharge amount to \$40 (previously \$30) as of April 2020.

## More information

For more information on COVID-19 support for Canberrans facing homelessness or domestic and family violence, please email [quality@act.gov.au](mailto:quality@act.gov.au).