

ACT Food Relief Action Plan

2026-2028

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Health and Community Services Directorate



ACT
Government

Acknowledgement of Country

The Health and Community Services Directorate acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the ACT and recognise any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region.

We respect the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, and their continuing culture and contribution they make to the Canberra region and the life of our city.

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A message from the Minister



I want all Canberrans to live a good life – one where everyone has reliable access to quality, nutritious food.

In a city like Canberra, where many enjoy relative advantage, it can be easy to overlook that others in our community are going hungry. Food insecurity is a real and ongoing experience for many Canberrans. I am continually heartened by the generosity and dedication of individuals and organisations working tirelessly to support those in need.

Food insecurity is an important issue for the ACT Government, which is why we have consistently invested in emergency food relief. This support ensures that when people face crisis and uncertainty about where their next meal will come from, there is a safety net in place to provide assistance in times of hardship.

I recognise that food insecurity does not occur in isolation. It is a symptom of broader social and economic challenges - inequality, unemployment, poverty, and cost of living pressures. That's why I am proud to be part of a government and a community that takes meaningful action to help those most in need and provide access to critical supports that help people live in dignity.

This Action Plan marks an important first step in what will be an ongoing, collaborative process with the sector to better understand and address the needs of those with lived and living experience. The Action Plan reflects the ACT Government's existing commitments and outlines the initial action the ACT Government will take to deliver meaningfully for the community.

The Action Plan focuses on three areas: *Feeding Our Community*; *Supporting Our Services*; and *Enhancing Our System*. It takes an iterative approach – balancing immediate actions with longer-term strategies – to better understand the drivers of food insecurity and build capacity and resilience in the sector.

I was pleased to consult with key partners in shaping this Plan and I thank the Food and Emergency Relief Advisory Committee and the Network for their valuable guidance and advice throughout.

I look forward to continuing our strong partnerships with the community sector as we work together to understand, prevent and respond to food insecurity.

Suzanne Orr

Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services



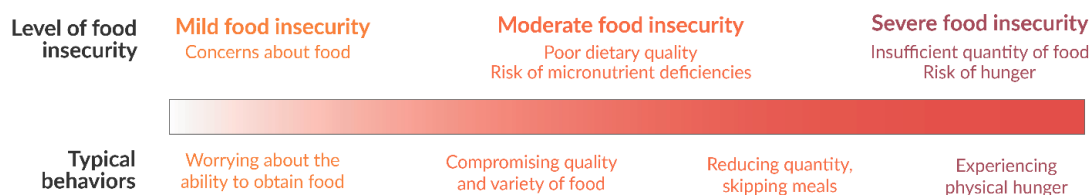
Setting the scene

Food Insecurity

Food insecurity is a situation when people lack secure access to sufficient amounts of safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life.¹

In Australia, in 2023, one in eight (13.2% or 1.3 million) households experienced food insecurity.² Due to the population of the ACT, and limitations with survey data, there is unfortunately limited community-wide data that demonstrates the rates of food insecurity for Canberra's households.

A food insecurity scale can help build an understanding of the levels of food insecurity and the experiences/behaviours dependent on food insecurity levels. The below scale is drawn from that used by the United Nations.³



What we do know is that recent years have seen a rise in the number of people seeking food relief. While services were expanded in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, demand has remained high. Many Canberrans continue to rely on these supports, with some experiencing chronic food insecurity. This reflects broader national economic and social pressures, including the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, which is affecting households across Australia. Future emergency events, including health and natural emergencies may also lead to a further increase in people requiring food relief.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us uncertainty and challenge, it has also demonstrated the great strength, resilience, cooperation and dedication of our food relief providers and our communities. Their passion for supporting vulnerable individuals and families across the ACT has been unwavering.

During this time, the ACT Government has responded. Between 2020-21 and 2024-25, the ACT Government has invested approximately \$22 million in food and related relief initiatives across sectors such as homelessness, community development, health, and education.

¹ Based on the definition provided by the United National Food and Agriculture Organization - [Home | Measuring hunger, food security and food consumption | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations](#)

² Food insecurity, 2023 | Australian Bureau of Statistics

³ [How is food insecurity measured? - Our World in Data](#)

Our Goal

The 2026-28 Action Plan signifies a starting point of a journey towards a Canberra where people experience equitable access to nutritious, culturally appropriate food and emergency support for Canberrans most in need.

Through this Plan, the ACT Government aims to empower key stakeholders—including government, the community sector, businesses, and philanthropic partners—to strengthen food relief efforts in a sustainable and coordinated way, with the flexibility to adapt, refine, and respond to the evolving needs of our community over time.

The Action Plan sets out priorities for the ACT Government and its partners to work together in delivering a more strategic and cohesive response to food relief across the Territory.

The ACT Government hopes to also drive the incremental development of an evidence base by leveraging existing local and national data sources to better understand, baseline, and project demand to inform future investment decisions and enhance service system.

The success of this work relies on the continued commitment and collaboration of all partners. This Action Plan reflects the ACT Government’s determination to lead with purpose and work in genuine partnership to deliver meaningful outcomes for the Canberra community.

Our Principles

In delivering the commitments made in this Action Plan, the ACT Government will be guided by the following principles:

Supporting Canberrans most in need

Putting people in need at the centre of decision making. Food relief plays a vital role in connecting those most vulnerable in Canberra with services that address the underlying causes of food insecurity.

Collaboration and Partnership

Strong collaboration across governments, the food relief sector, and the broader community is essential for developing effective solutions that address food relief needs and promote long-term food security. Building partnerships between community organisations, food providers, governments, and donors enhances coordination and supports shared objectives

Evidence based decisions

To ensure food relief efforts remain relevant and effective, it is essential to gather evidence and share information across the food and emergency relief sectors. This enables our ability to adapt to the evolving needs of individuals and communities over time.

Our Focus Areas

The Action Plan presents three focus areas. They represent the high level objectives and priority areas for current and future action.

Feeding Our Community

This focus area ensures those with living experience of food insecurity are at the centre of our focus. The purpose of this focus area is to ensure efforts are delivering dignified, equitable, and sufficient access to quality food for those who need it most, through a range of responsive and inclusive service delivery methods.

This focus area is designed to promote the meaningful engagement of lived experience. This includes supporting the collection and dissemination of insights from Canberrans accessing food relief, ensuring their voices inform service planning and delivery.

Existing initiatives

Continue to deliver food relief and related programs to our community.

1. **Food Assistance Program** - provides access to quality food through two service elements including freight subsidy to support small to medium community food pantries accessing essential Foodbank item from Sydney and food rescue activities in the ACT.
2. **Emergency Material and Financial Aid (EMFA) Program** - provides timely support to individuals and families experiencing disadvantage and financial stress. Support may take various forms including but not limited to vouchers, grocery items, clothing, and financial assistance. Over \$1.6 million per annum is invested in both Food Assistance Program and the EMFA.
3. **Food Relief for Homelessness Services** - provides over \$1.6 million per year to community organisations to provide nutritious free meals (breakfast, lunch, and dinner), access to shower facilities, hygiene supplies, clothing, life skills, information, advice, outreach, social support, engagement point and referral to other support services.
4. **Meals in Schools** – students at five ACT Public Schools have access to free breakfast and lunch three days a week. The 2024-25 Budget provided nearly \$4 million in funding to deliver the Meals in Schools program at five initial school sites.

Action 1

Establish a lived experience forum to gather insights from Canberrans accessing food relief, ensuring their voices inform service planning and delivery.

Supporting Our Services

This focus area is intended to enhance the capacity and capability of community providers—both large and small—by fostering stronger connections, collaboration, and a place-based collective impact approach to service delivery.

Existing initiatives

1. **Canberra Food Relief Network** – maintain a coordinated network of service providers, enabling ongoing collaboration, knowledge sharing, and alignment of efforts to respond effectively to community needs.
2. **Food Bank Fund** – leverage the commitment made by the ACT Government in the 2025-26 Budget to continue to boost food relief efforts across Canberra.

Action 2

Support capacity building and workforce development by working with services to identify workforce and organisational development needs and assisting them to access training opportunities aligned with the food relief sector.

Enhancing Our System

This focus area aims to build a more coordinated food relief system by strengthening infrastructure and enhancing the contributions of key system actors across government, business, philanthropy, and the not-for-profit sector.

In order to achieve against this Focus Area, some key foundational work is required to make important progress. The Actions under this Focus Areas reflect the foundational action necessary.

Action 3

Establish an ACT Government policy position for the food relief system, informed by best practice evidence, research, and lived experience. This policy will draw on national and local datasets to guide future strategic directions and investment.

Action 4

Undertake a comprehensive mapping of existing providers and service offerings to better understand the types of support available, access pathways, and potential service gaps.

Action 5

Collaborate with partners to analyse current food sourcing and distribution models and explore opportunities to strengthen these systems through partnerships with commercial entities and other stakeholders.

Action 6

Explore and support the establishment of a shared warehouse model to increase cold and dry storage capacity across the ACT, enabling more efficient and equitable distribution of food relief.



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