ACT Government
Justice and Community Safety

Open Access release outcome decision – Partial access granted

Document Category: Ministerial Briefs

Title of document: Minister for Consumer Affairs – Quarter 4 2020 briefs

Description of the information: Question Time Briefs provided to the Minister Consumer Affairs between 1 October and 31 December 2020.

The original record of this document contained information the release of which would be contrary to the public interest. This information has been redacted from this publicly available version of the document for the reasons outlined below.

Grounds for decision to withhold disclosure

It was decided certain information contained in the document would not be disclosed as, on balance its release would be contrary to the public interest test set out in section 17 of the FOI Act.

I have included below the relevant factors considered in making this decision.

2.1 Factors favouring disclosure in the public interest

(a) Disclosure of the information could reasonably be expected to do any of the following:

(i) promote open discussion of public affairs and enhance the government's accountability;

(ii) contribute to positive and informed debate on important issues or matters of public interest;

(iv) ensure effective oversight of expenditure of public funds;

(viii) reveal the reason for a government decision and any background or contextual information that informed the decision.

I consider that the release of the ministerial briefs may be expected to help inform ongoing discussions and debate on matters of continued public importance. The disclosure of this information additionally helps in promoting government accountability and transparency.

2.2 Factors favouring non-disclosure in the public interest

(a) Disclosure of the information could reasonably be expected to do any of the following:

(xi) prejudice trade secrets, business affairs or research of an agency or person.

On balance, I consider the ministerial briefs to be in the public interest to release, with minor redactions made to the business information of service providers, where disclosure could reasonably be expected to prejudice their business affairs.

Review rights

My decision to release or withhold open access information is a reviewable decision as identified in Schedule 3 of the FOI Act. You can seek an Ombudsman review of this outcome under section 73 of the Act within 20 working days from the day that my decision is published on the Justice and Community Safety Directorate website, or a longer period allowed by the Ombudsman.

If you wish to request a review of my decision, you may write to the ACT Ombudsman at:

ACT Ombudsman
Attention: ACT Strategy and FOI Section
GPO Box 442
CANBERRA ACT 2601
Via email: actfoi@ombudsman.gov.au

Further assistance

If you have any queries regarding this Open Access release, please contact JACSFOI@act.gov.au or phone (02) 6207 2167.

Authorised by

L. Callow

Lauren Callow
Information Officer
2 January 2026

ACT Government
Justice and Community Safety

OPEN ACCESS Q4 2020 SCHEDULE
PORTFOLIO: MINISTER FOR CONSUMER AFFAIRS

No.	Folio	Description	Date	Status	Reason for non-release or deferral
Question Time Briefs - Sitting Days 2 & 3 December 2020					
1	1	Question Time Briefs Index - 2 & 3 December 2020	December		
2	2-6	Support for Community Service Providers during the Covid-19 Pandemic	December	Partial	Sch 2, s2.2 (a)(xi)
3	7-10	Strong Connected Neighbourhoods	December		

MINISTER FOR CONSUMER AFFAIRS

QUESTION TIME BRIEFS

Question Time Briefs	
1.	Support for community service providers during the COVID-19 pandemic
2.	Strong Connected Neighbourhoods (incl. Jerilderie Court)

ACT Government

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

MIN:2020/000095-069

Portfolio/s: Consumer Affairs

ISSUE: SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY SERVICE PROVIDERS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Talking points:

- The Government is continuing to support service providers to provide services to vulnerable Canberrans in the current environment.
- The Justice and Community Safety (JaCS) Directorate has been engaging with a range of service providers on a regular basis in relation to their COVID-19 planning and ability to continue to deliver funded services, or to continue to operate at a reduced level.
- The approach being taken is to support the continued delivery of the greatest level of service, in a safe environment, and to ensure service providers, as organisations, are assisted to deliver their services to the greatest extent possible.
- The majority of our service contracts have been drafted to allow the Territory to alter them to respond swiftly to changing circumstances. In the current environment this allows us to work flexibly with our service providers.
- If changes to contracts are necessary, depending on the service provider, these can include:
    - Reducing or varying the level, type and frequency of service.
    - Delaying or relaxing reporting obligations.
    - Suspending obligations to meet key performance indicators and outcomes to allow for adaptation to new conditions.
    - Removing penalties for non-compliance with contracts arising from the COVID-19 Emergency.
- We have also progressed amendments and advice within the Road Safety and Transport Regulation space to provide guidance to service providers and industry.
- The JaCS Directorate has been working with Access Canberra to liaise with industry and make system changes to provide information online, in response to any closures of Service Centres.

Cleared as complete and accurate:	01/12/2020	
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TRIM Ref:	2020/000095-069	

- Stimulus funding has been made available to the JaCS Directorate for funded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander controlled organisations and to Community Legal Centres (CLCs); other eligible community organisations have received additional funds through the Community Services Directorate (CSD) based $1,000,000 Rapid Response package.

Key Information

- To support the Government's economic efforts and ensure that service providers are able and ready to recommence normal service delivery in the future, the JaCS Directorate has taken a flexible approach with service providers, as to:
    - their COVID-19 planning and ability to continue to deliver on funded services, while keeping their staff and clients safe;
    - their ability to continue to deliver face to face services;
    - options for delivery online;
    - where this is not possible, their ability to continue to deliver services via electronic means (i.e. telephone);
    - where all client service delivery is no longer possible or appropriate given the service, undertaking work to support delivery of the services when they recommence (i.e. improving reporting, data capture mechanisms etc);
    - where this is not possible or required given the state of the contract, undertaking work that furthers the objectives of the contract in the current environment; and
    - where all of these are not possible, consideration will then be given, in the particular circumstances, to continuing payment of the contract in the absence of service delivery to allow service providers to continue to pay staff.
- Amendment of the services under a contract will generally not be considered:
    - frustration;
    - contract default; and
    - grounds to terminate generally.

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QUESTION TIME BRIEF

Background Information

A. Guiding Principles/Approach

1. Discuss COVID-19 plans with service providers.
2. Discuss with service providers their ability to continue to deliver face to face services.
3. If this is not possible, discuss with service providers their ability to continue to deliver services via electronic means (i.e. telephone). It is anticipated that all services will be able to continue in some form – face to face contact replaced with electronic communication etc.
4. If this ceases to be possible, or not appropriate given the service, discuss with service providers what they could undertake with support delivery of the services (i.e. improving reporting, data capture mechanisms etc): this will be provided to all Service Providers, and refined if necessary.
5. If this is not possible, or required given the status of the contract, other work that could be undertaken to further the objective of the contract in the current environment.
6. If this is not possible, consideration will be given, in the particular circumstances, to continuing payment of the contract in the absence of service delivery to allow service providers to continue to pay staff. This supports the Government's economic efforts and ensures that service providers are able and ready to pick up service delivery when appropriate.

B. JPSP Programs – update

Current contracts affected by COVID-19, and stimulus funding requested, applied for or promised, are summarised below:

Organisations

(a) ***Tjillari***, delivering Galambany Circle Court Support and Yarrabi Bamirr. Attempted email and phone discussions with CEO, Deb Evans, to determine alternative service provision levels have been difficult to obtain to date. Tjillari initially requested Sch 2, s2.2 (a)(xi), has signed a deed of grant for $20,000 from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fund through Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and has been allocated an additional $45,000 through the CSD Rapid Response grants.

(b) ***Yeddung Mura***, delivering Throughcare, Yarning Circles and Yarrabi Bamirr. Discussions with CEO, Priestley Obed to determine alternative service provision. Yarning Circles will be provided electronically. Yeddund Mura initially Sch 2, s2.2 (a)(xi) , and has received $20,000 from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fund through Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, and has been allocated an additional $31,000 through the CSD Rapid Response grants.

(c) ***Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS)***, delivering Ngurrambai, Duty Lawyer, and Front Up. Discussions to keep abreast of alternative service provision and challenges being experienced. ALS Sch 2, s2.2 (a)(xi) has signed a deed of grant for $50,000 from the CLC fund, and Sch 2, s2.2 (a)(xi) through the CSD Rapid Response grants and has been allocated $21,000 of this. ALS has been allocated an additional $142,000 through the JaCS Directorate administered legal assistance sector funding, including $17,000

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for ICT from the Commonwealth through the Project Agreement for COVID-19 Legal Assistance Services.

(d) ***Winnunga*** delivering Yarrabi Bamirr***.*** Email contact to determine alternative service provision. Winnunga Sch 2, s2.2 (a)(xi) and has been promised $100,000 from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fund through Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, and $159,000 from ACT Health for minor capital works, including the setting up of the second reception at Winnunga.

Programs

- ***Yarrabi Bamirr***
  - Delivered by Winnunga, Tjillari Justice and Yeddung Mura.
  - Involves face to face contact, but can be by phone which is not ideal.
  - Referral services are likely to impose their own restrictions, and adjustments have been made to accommodate these.
  - Ongoing review with service providers and program clients.
- ***Ngurrambai***
  - Delivered by the ALS.
  - Involves face to face contact, but can be by phone which is not ideal.
  - Monitoring court activities and restrictions.
  - Monitoring Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC) restrictions.
  - Bail plans can be provided by email, and clients/lawyers communications done remotely.
- ***Front up***
  - Delivered by the ALS.
  - Involves face to face contact, but can be by phone which is not ideal.
  - As above, and activity is increasing with support for warrants and breaches of bail.
  - Regular review with ALS to monitor challenges.
- ***Duty Lawyer***
  - Delivered by the ALS.
  - Involves face to face contact, but can be by phone which is not ideal.
  - Monitoring court activities and restrictions.
  - Monitoring AMC restrictions.
  - Regular review with ALS to monitor challenges.
- ***Throughcare***
  - This is face to face contact focussed.
  - Yeddung Mura has made IT systems available to community members wishing to participate in virtual visits at AMC.
  - Ongoing monitoring of options with Yeddung Mura.
- ***Yarning Circles for Justice***
  - Face to face preferred, though currently delivered online.
  - Ongoing monitoring of options with Yeddung Mura.
- ***Galambany***

- Court has recommenced.
- Support for existing clients ongoing and possible to do by phone, web-ex, email and in person.
- Tjillari have filled the Galambany support worker role.

- ***Strong Connected Neighbourhoods***
  - Delivered by Reclink Australia.
  - Largely face to face dependent.
  - Alterations to the delivery of the program have been made to ensure social distancing and other Covid-19 safety measures can be adhered to for the safety of staff and residents.
  - Regular review with Reclink to monitor challenges.

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

MIN:2020/000095-040

Portfolio/s: Consumer Affairs

ISSUE: STRONG CONNECTED NEIGHBOURHOODS

Talking points:

- The Strong Connected Neighbourhood Program (the program) (formerly known as High Density Housing Program) is an example of place-based justice reinvestment that commenced in 2008, as a service facilitation initiative.
- The 2018-19 Budget Review provided $1.6 million over 3 years to sustain and expand the program that currently operates on Ainslie Avenue to also provide support services to Illawarra Court in Belconnen on an ongoing basis
- The program is a multi-agency, collaborative initiative by Justice and Community Safety Directorate (JACS) designed to improve the lives of, and reduce recidivism rates for residents living in high density public housing sites along Ainslie Avenue and Illawarra Court Belconnen.
- This multi-agency initiative includes JACS, Housing ACT, ACT Health, ACT Policing and Reclink Australia and seeks to achieve the following objectives:
  a. prevent or reduce opportunities for crime
  b. promote community safety
  c. develop pro-social and law-abiding community engagement and
  d. facilitate access to services that are related to justice, health, mental health, education and employment.
- The program targets support to high and complex needs residents including:
  - socially disengaged or isolated people,
  - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people,
  - women (including mothers), children and youth, and
  - residents who have had contact with or are at risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system.

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- Reclink Australia, through an on the ground Program Manager and a small team, delivers a range of structured and informal programs to promote and deliver health, social and economic benefits to the residents of these public housing sites. These include activities such as building and maintaining community gardens, neighbourhood chats, the Skills Development Shed and a monthly Run, Roll or Walk event at Lake Burley Griffin.
- The 2018 evaluation of the program by the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC),[1] reported that it met its objectives by:
  - reducing violent crime by 50 per cent,
  - reducing property crime by 60 per cent,
  - reducing disturbance incidents by 49 per cent,
  - increasing levels of social cohesion among residents at public housing sites across Ainslie Avenue, and
  - providing a realised saving to government (of police time alone) through reduced crimes of at least $0.42 to $0.51 for every $1 invested.
- The value of the program was also recognised nationally in 2013, with a National Crime and Violence Prevention Safety Award through the Austalian Institue of Criminology.

Jerilderie Court (on Ainslie Avenue)

- Concerns have been raised about criminal and antisocial behaviour at Jerilderie Court on Ainslie Avenue.
- In response, JACS has been leading a multi agency task force made up of Housing ACT, Reclink, ACT Policing and the Mental Health, Justice Health, Alcohol and Drug Services (MHJHADS).
- The issues occurring at the site are complex and include non-residents engaging in dealing drugs, drug overdoses, a fire and shooting incidents.

[1] https://aic.gov.au/publications/rr/rr6

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- Agencies have increased their presence at the site and are providing additional support to vulnerable residents of the Jerilderie Court and evolve a strategy to tackle the non-residents activitities.
- The developments include:
    - increased agency presence and action;
    - identification of un-inhabited units and issuing notices on these sites to discourage squatters;
    - a saturation of property inspections to better inform support needs for vulnerable tenants and future actions that can be taken under the Residential Tenancies Act 1997;
    - security patrols have increased at the complex, with a specific request to report any antisocial behaviour/ suspected criminal activity;
    - MHJHADS is proactively engaging with their existing mental health consumers to assess their needs and issues.
- Detailed discussion on issues is difficult as the matters concerned are often of criminal nature and are best investigated and responded to by ACT Policing in the first instance.

Illawarra Court (Belconnen)

- Reclink has commenced engaging with tenants residing at Illawarra Court and is working with ACT Housing to set up a community room and shipping container workshop.
- Delays to formal programs running are due to complications surrounding setting up secure facilities to work from.
- A multiagency taskforce is being established with Belconnen stakeholders to address concerns of criminal and antisocial behaviour.

Key Information

- The multi agency task force agreed that following its intial 12 week focus the immediate response was to evolve a long term strategy to tackle the non-residents activities and support the vulnerable residents of the Jerilderie Court and along Ainslie Avenue.
- The developments include:
    - Poisitive reception of the increase in agencies presence and action.

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- Housing ACT identifying and securing un-inhabited units.
- Housing ACT undertaking a saturation of Property Inspections.
- ACT Policing, through its newly formed tactician team, executing search warrants at both Jerilderie Court and Kanangra Court, making arrests and seizing allegedly stolen property.
- Reclink preparing a community garden at Jerilderie Court.
- City Mental Health engaging proactively with mental health consumers at the residences.

Background Information

The program was independently evaluated by La Trobe University in 2012. Using semi-structured interviews, the Ainslie Avenue residents viewed the program as an essential part of their lives that broke down the barriers to isolation, assisted in establishing and maintaining friendships, alleviated boredom, provided a sense of community, encouraged the development of self-esteem and confidence, and assisted in the acquisition of new skills.

The delivery of the program is overseen by an established multi-agency working group, which includes representatives from Housing ACT, Canberra Health Services and ACT Policing and Reclink Australia. The working group has been kept up to date on the positive progress of the program including at its most recent meeting of 3 December 2019.

In 2018-19 Budget funding was provided to expand the program to Illawarra Court, Belconnen considering the recommendations provided by AIC in its recent evaluation.

The 2018-19 midyear Budget has provided the program recurrent funding and changed the name of the program to 'Strong Connected Neighbourhoods' that reflects the key outcomes sought and achieved by the program.

- There has been consistent positive media coverage on ABC radio and in the Canberra Times about the program and its successes over the last 10 years[2]. Three examples are:

  https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-08-23/inside-canberras-kanangra-court-and-the-impact-of-reclink/12580084

  https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6118437/program-is-a-proactive-way-to-cut-crime-in-canberra/

  http://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6111795/canberras-new-community-guardian-is-already-saving-lives/?cs=14225

[2] https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/5999895/p50hh0/

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