



# CANBERRA FOOD RELIEF SECTOR TOOLKIT

A resource for food relief sector workers



VolunteeringACT  
an inclusive Canberra



November 2025

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

VolunteeringACT acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the Traditional Custodians of the Canberra Region and recognises any other peoples or families with connection to this Country. We acknowledge and respect their vital ongoing contributions to the community and are committed to reconciliation. We will continue to walk alongside First Nations Peoples and embrace the traditions, stories, and wisdoms of the oldest continuing cultures in the world.

This document was created on Ngunnawal Country.

VolunteeringACT also acknowledges people of all abilities, ages, genders, and sexualities, and from all cultures. Their skills, expertise, and time are critical to delivering services and programs, and making Canberra a better place to live.

We also acknowledge the contribution of all volunteer involving organisations including food relief providers that contribute to the health and happiness of our community.



The Canberra Food Relief Network is an ACT Government funded initiative. Preparation of this toolkit was made possible by funding from the Chief Minister's Charitable Fund administered by Hands Across Canberra.



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# PURPOSE OF THIS TOOLKIT

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**PHOTO:** [Holy Cross Tuckerbox](#)

This toolkit has been developed by VolunteeringACT in collaboration with the Canberra Food Relief Network.

This toolkit has been created to provide ACT food relief sector organisations and their volunteers access to the information they need to enhance their operational effectiveness and increase collaboration with other food relief service providers.

# INTRODUCTION

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Food insecurity continues to grow - but is hidden in the Canberra community.

The rising cost of living in the ACT is contributing to a situation where all Canberrans do not have both physical and economic access to the food they need for a healthy lifestyle. Increasingly, Canberrans are having to choose between buying food and meeting other financial responsibilities such as paying bills.

The 2025 ACTCOSS Cost of Living Report<sup>1</sup> shows that food price rises in the ACT are widespread, including staples. The costs have become so prohibitive for those on income support that they are 14 times more likely to skip one or more meals per day than the general population.

Additionally the ACT community sector is seeing more people in full-time work seeking support to cover their cost of living. This increased demand has put further strain on the ACT's already underfunded essential community services. The 2025 Food Insecurity in the Canberra Region: A Strategic Picture<sup>2</sup> report shows that most service providers have experienced at minimum a 25% increase in the numbers of people using their services. The report also identifies the key challenges experienced by food relief services in the ACT as being:

- Lack of reliable funding and donations
- Lack of consistent access to quality food and
- Logistical challenges including food storage and distribution and management of volunteers.

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1. [https://actcoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/2025-Report-ACT-Cost-of-living-report-2025\\_FINAL.pdf](https://actcoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/2025-Report-ACT-Cost-of-living-report-2025_FINAL.pdf)

2. <https://volunteeringact.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Food-Insecurity-in-the-Canberra-Region-A-Strategic-Picture-February-2025.pdf>

# CANBERRA FOOD RELIEF SECTOR

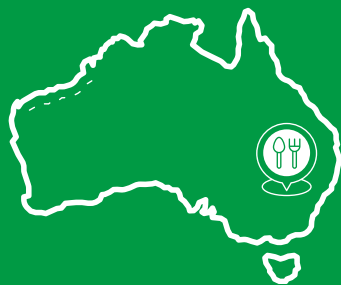
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## **Importance of a linked-up Canberra food relief ecosystem**

The food relief sector in the Canberra Region plays a vital role in ensuring Canberrans have access to food and essential, non-negotiable items and supports. VolunteeringACT coordinates the Canberra Food Relief Network made up of around 50 community organisations and services providing direct and indirect regular support to Territory residents experiencing food insecurity. These organisations range from emergency food relief and food banks to local food pantries and organisations that collect, store and distribute food and meals in the community.

## **A sustainable sector requires immediate action and investment**

ACT food relief organisations are experiencing increasing demand as cost of living pressures escalate but many receive little to no government funding; they are reliant on fundraising, donations from individuals, and philanthropic partners. Many food relief services, including those providing emergency food relief, are wholly volunteer run or are heavily reliant on the involvement of volunteers to collect, prepare, and distribute food or run food relief services.



**Canberra Food Relief Network  
has around 50 community  
organisations and services**

## FOOD RELIEF SERVICES IN THE ACT



**PHOTO:** [Vinnies Roadhouse](#)

Impacts of the recent cost of living crisis have led many Canberrans who were previously financially and food secure to access food relief services. Food relief services are services that receive and redistribute food to community organisations or individuals in need of safe, nutritious, and quality food. Food relief services are often responsible for sourcing and transporting essential foods to communities and organisations when food donations to organisations are insufficient. Food relief organisations aim to ensure a variety of nutritious, culturally appropriate foods are available to people in need.

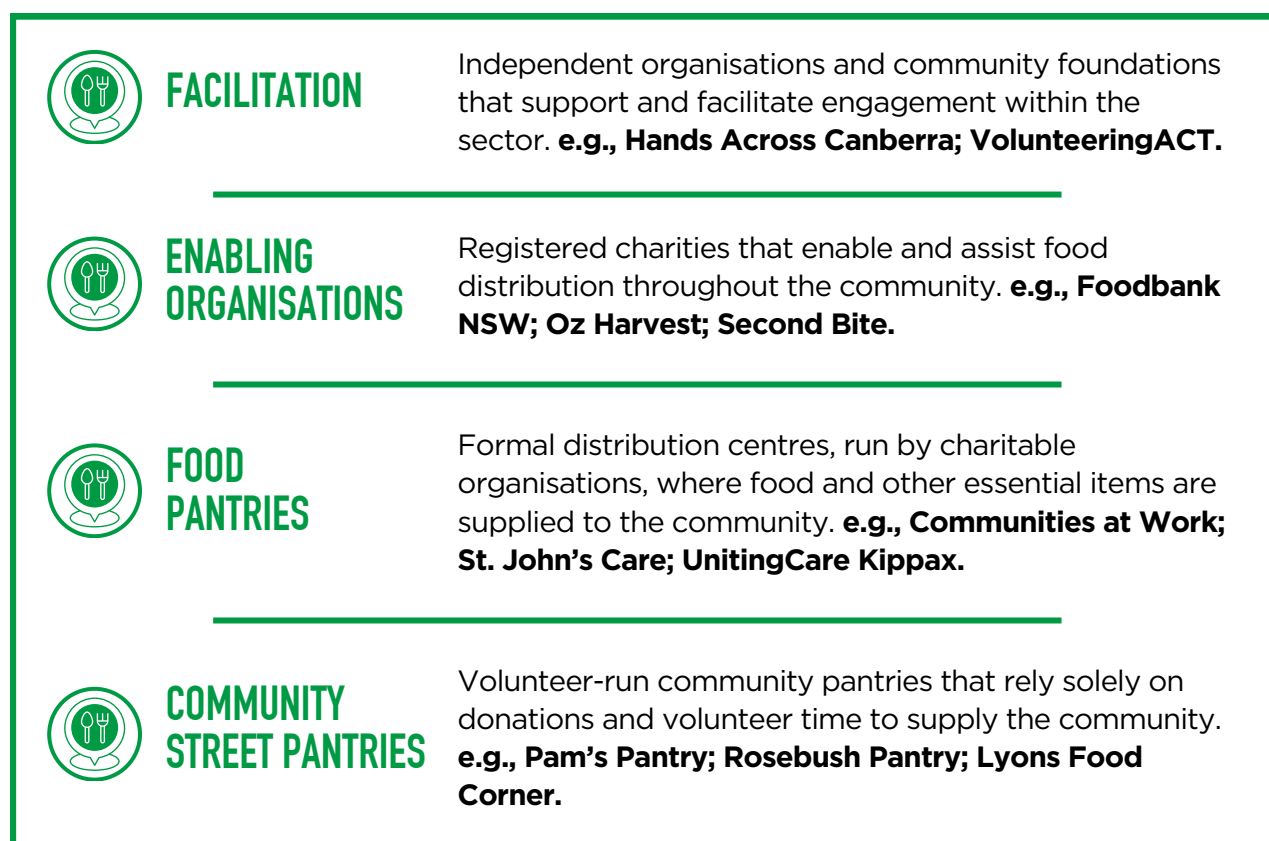
For many years, the sector was informally organised, sharing information and resources as needed. In 2022, the ACT Government provided funding to VolunteeringACT to formally establish and manage the Canberra Food Relief Network which proved transformative in the way food relief was coordinated to support Canberrans experiencing food insecurity or disadvantage.



Based on data generated through the ACT's Food Relief Network database launched in March 2023, it is possible to create a snapshot of food relief services in the network. Canberra's food relief sector is made up predominantly of organisations that provide free or low-cost meals and food items.

The Network also has a number of cascading members who are often supported by the Network's larger organisations. These members have a primary focus away from food relief and support vulnerable community members who are experiencing challenges such as family and domestic violence, mental ill health or alcohol and other drug issues.

In November 2023, an independent consultation conducted with many of the food relief providers in the Canberra Region identified four cohorts of service providers, as listed in figure 1 below.



**FIGURE 1 - Four cohorts of food relief services in the Canberra Region**

3. <https://volunteeringact.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Canberra-Food-Relief-Community-Action-Plan.pdf>



# ACCESSING FOOD BANK AND FOOD RESCUE SERVICES

Food banks are a network of not-for-profit organisations that rescue and distribute food to services and, in some instances, individuals. This section of the toolkit provides information where street pantries and other food relief providers can partner with larger food banks. These agencies are registered charities that enable and assist food distribution throughout the community and will usually not have a direct pantry local presence in the Canberra Region.

There are three food banks and food rescue services that support the ACT community: FoodBank NSW/ACT, Oz Harvest, and Second Bite.

Organisations need to register with FoodBank NSW/ACT, Secondbite and OzHarvest to be able to receive supplies, noting that OzHarvest is currently oversubscribed and new organisations will go on a waiting list. SecondBite have currently paused applications for new partners as they focus on meeting the growing demand of their existing charity partners.



Scan the QR code to know about **FoodBank NSW/ACT**



Scan the QR code to know about **OzHarvest Canberra**



Scan the QR code to know about **SecondBite**



## FoodBank NSW/ACT



**PHOTO:** [FoodBank NSW/ACT](#)

Across Australia, Foodbank provides food and grocery relief to 2,929 front-line charities and 3,220 school breakfast programs to help feed people in need. Last year alone, they sourced enough food for 92 million meals.

FoodBank NSW/ACT work with partners across the food and grocery sector, farmers and growers, retailers, and key suppliers to source, rescue, and distribute food and grocery items to every corner of NSW and the ACT to help feed communities.

Through a network of more than 700 place-based community partners and 650 schools, FoodBank NSW/ACT deliver essential food relief supplies year-round, equivalent to over 26 million meals each year.

- **Website:** [foodbank.org.au/nsw-act/](https://foodbank.org.au/nsw-act/)
- **Email:** [office@foodbanknsw.org.au](mailto:office@foodbanknsw.org.au)
- **Phone:** (02) 9756 3099

To receive food from FoodBank, organisations need to register as a FoodBank Community Partner by completing the [application form](#).

Note there is a nominal cost element based on a modest cost recovery model and most items have a per unit cost.

## OzHarvest



**PHOTO:** [OzHarvest](#)

OzHarvest works with 64 charities right across the Canberra Region. Charities will be included on a specific delivery schedule as part of one of three daily delivery routes (based in north, central or south zones).

Volumes and types of food cannot be ordered, or guaranteed – however drivers work closely with agencies to understand the needs of each organisation.

Rescued food may include fruit, vegetables, cooked meals, sandwiches, bakery items, bread, drinks, canned foods/dry stock, dairy.

Charities can contact OzHarvest Canberra directly to organise a food delivery.

- Email: [Canberra.logistics@ozharvest.org](mailto:Canberra.logistics@ozharvest.org)
- Phone: 0493 164 210 (between 7:30am – 2pm)

OzHarvest advises in advance that their Canberra waitlist is large. Demand on their services is high and the ability to begin the service depends on a variety of factors.



## SecondBite



PHOTO: [SecondBite](#)

SecondBite is Australia's largest free food rescue organisation, with operations in every state and territory, rescuing and delivering nutritious food free of charge to people in need.

SecondBite exists to ensure that good food destined for landfill reaches people facing hunger and food insecurity. In doing so, we address critical social, environmental, and economic challenges.

Currently SecondBite have paused applications for new partners as they focus on meeting the growing demand of their existing charity partners.

If you need to get in touch with SecondBite directly you can contact:

Email: [CommunityconnectACT@secondbite1.onmicrosoft.com](mailto:CommunityconnectACT@secondbite1.onmicrosoft.com)

Phone: 1800 263 283

It is important to note that the local demand on their services is high and the ability to begin the service depends on a variety of factors.



## FURTHER INFORMATION TO SUPPORT FOOD RELIEF SERVICES

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Food insecurity does not happen in isolation from other social issues, and it is likely that patrons that are seeking support with food insecurity will also seek support for other issues. The following sections outline how to access a range of information on how to find and contact support services for issues such as housing, alcohol and other drug support services, free laundry and showers, financial support services, health services, legal support services, domestic and family violence services, etc.

### Community information guides



### Canberra Community Directory and Diary



### Nutritional advice and recipes



### Training opportunities



## Community Information Guides

All areas of Canberra are serviced by either street pantries or formal food relief services. Communities in the neighbouring NSW regional towns of Queanbeyan and Yass have one main food pantry each for people on low incomes with concession cards.

VolunteeringACT's Community Information Guides are a quick reference to popular community services in the Canberra Region.

The Information Guides are updated regularly and can be downloaded from the VolunteeringACT website. Scan the QR code to access the guides.

**SCAN ME**



Food and Groceries  
Relief Guide



Emergency and  
Crisis Support Guide



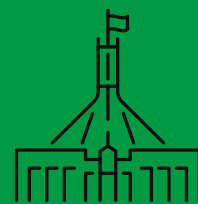
Homelessness  
Services Guide



Complaints Resolution  
Guide



Getting Around  
Canberra Guide



Legal Services Guide



Short Stay  
Accommodation Guide



Op Shop Guide



## My Community Directory and Diary

My Community Directory ACT is an online portal that helps people find services, community organisations, and support groups in the Canberra Region. The Directory has over 3,300 individual community services registered that are delivered by over 2,000 organisations from over 2,700 locations.

The Community Directory allows:

- organisations to publish service information and contact details, including website addresses and links.
- users to create useful lists of services within sectors, which can be saved and emailed.
- organisations to promote specific and recurring events with links to the ACT Community Diary.

Registration is free but limited to not-for-profit community organisations and clubs. My Community Directory ACT and My Community Diary ACT are free to list and edit your organisation's information.

VolunteeringACT is funded by the ACT Government to deliver My Community Directory ACT and My Community Diary ACT.

Access My Community  
Directory ACT



Access My Community  
Diary ACT



To register your organisation, go to My Community Directory and click on 'List for Free'.

You can get support by either calling the helpline on 1300 762 515 or by emailing [support@mycommunitydirectory.com.au](mailto:support@mycommunitydirectory.com.au)

## Nutritional Advice and Recipes



**PHOTO SOURCE:** [Canberra City Care](#)

Food pantries are often asked by patrons about nutritional advice and recipes to use the produce provided at the pantry.

At the most basic level, nutrition is about eating a regular, balanced diet. Eating food supplies nutrients to a person's body needs to maintain your brain, muscle, bone, nerves, skin, blood circulation, and immune system.

Maintaining a healthy diet on a budget can be challenging. The following resources provide information and recipes that might help.



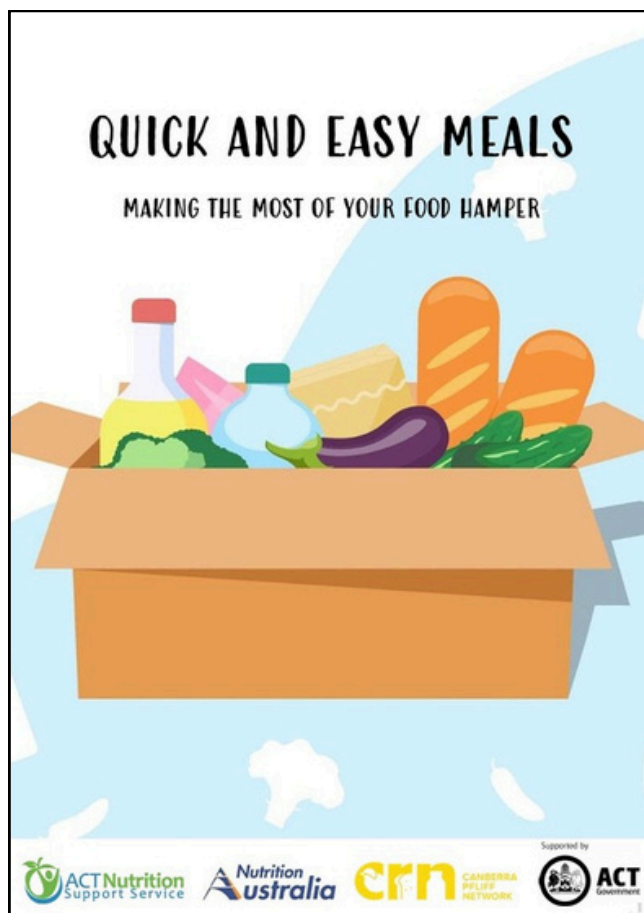
## ACT Nutrition Support Service

An initiative of Nutrition Australia ACT comprising of a team of Accredited Practising Dietitians helping to build nourishing and sustainable food environments for the wellbeing of the ACT and surrounding areas.

The ACT Nutrition Support Service works with ACT community organisations providing guidance on healthy eating including:

- Factsheets
- Recipes
- Infographics on money saving tips
- Publications and manuals
- Videos on feeding young children

The ACT Nutrition Support Service has produced a “Quick and Easy Meals” cookbook with recipes based on ingredients that were provided in food hampers during the COVID epidemic. This is still relevant now as items are similar to those found in many street pantries.



**Scan the QR code below  
to access the cookbook.**



## SCAN ME



### **Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra (MCCI)**

MCCI's Cook Off series of recipe books are a useful resource, with nine recipe books available for download.

The recipes in the cookbooks are the result of multicultural Cook-off teams of MCCI Seniors and Year 9 students at Lake Illawarra High School and Corrimal High School who came together to learn about different cultures and food.

### **OzHarvest - Nutrition Education Skills Training (NEST)**

NEST is six-week program teaching adults about healthy eating and easy, affordable cooking in a friendly and fun environment.

NEST is available in Adelaide, Brisbane, Sunshine Coast, Canberra, Newcastle, Melbourne and Sydney.

Scan the QR code to register interest

## SCAN ME



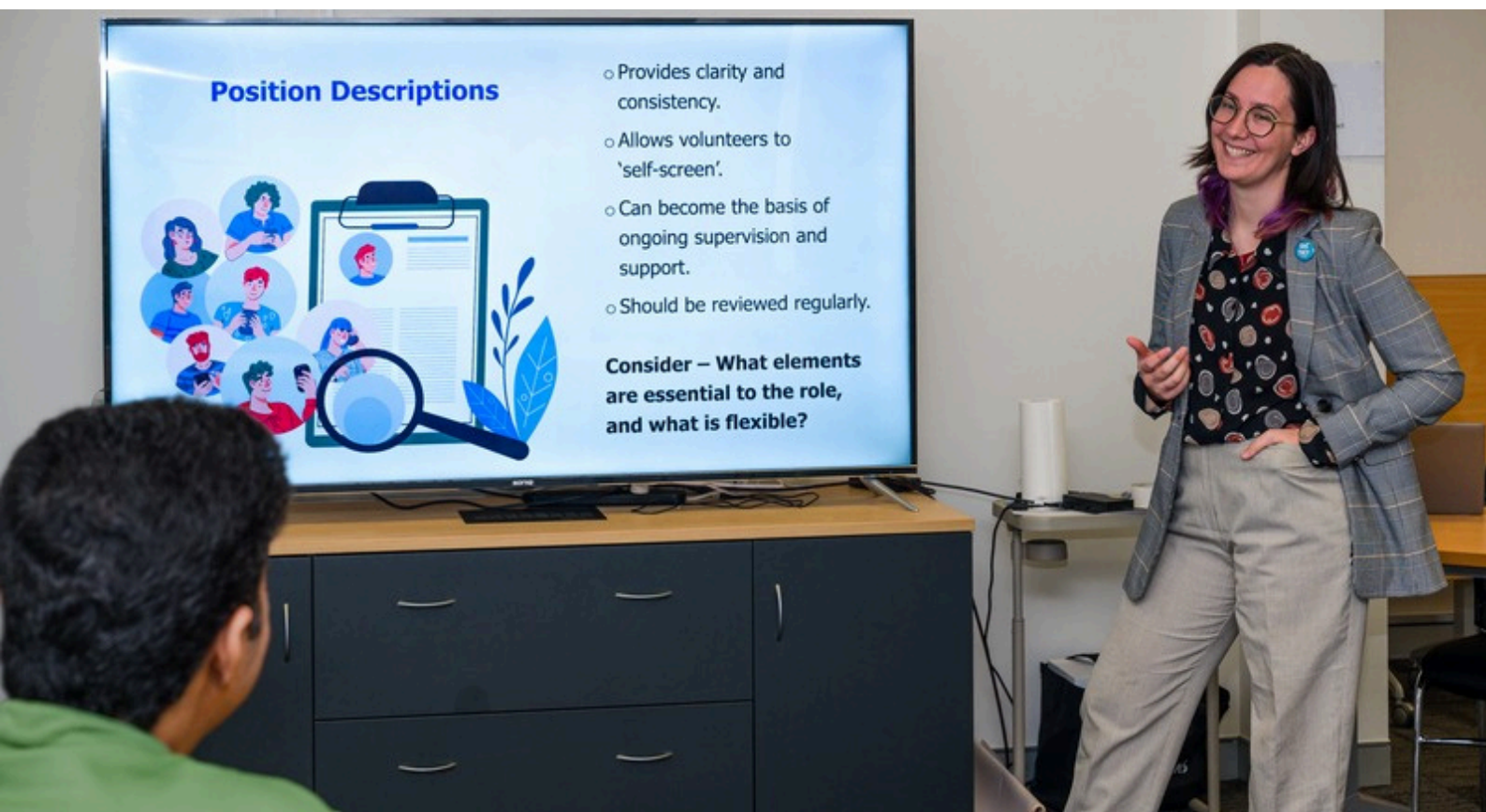
## SCAN ME



### **Preventive Health South Australia**

Preventive Health SA, part of the Government of South Australia has a website with some suggestions for healthy meals on a budget. Scan the QR code to access the recipes.

## Training



**PHOTO: [VolunteeringACT](#)**

Members of the Canberra Food Relief Network are committed to ensuring their teams have access to training so they can perform their duties safely and in accordance with current best practice. The following sections provide links to training resources that may be useful.

**SCAN ME**



Scan the QR code to access various training sessions provided by VolunteeringACT for volunteers, volunteer managers and volunteer involving organisations.

## Wellbeing and Boundaries



Working in the Food Relief Sector can be stressful, with workers potentially exposed to challenging situations with visitors who may be experiencing hardship.

VolunteeringACT has prepared training on Wellbeing and Boundaries for the Food Relief Sector. The training can currently be accessed in two ways:

- Attending an in-person session at VolunteeringACT offices on City Walk; or
- Listening to a recorded version of the training.

This training is available to food relief sector staff and volunteers and is not aimed at the general public.

## Food handling

Volunteers working in food preparation and service are recommended to complete one of these free training modules:

### I'm Alert Food Safety Training

I'm Alert Food Safety is an online food safety training program that various organisations subscribe to and deliver FREE food safety training to the food handlers within their local authority.

### Safety Training

The I'm Alert Food Safety Training can be accessed here. Note, you will need to create an account with ACT Health to access the learning materials.





## **DoFoodSafely**

DoFoodSafely is a free, non-accredited, online learning program provided by the Victorian Department of Health and proudly supported by Queensland Health, South Australia Health, and Tasmania Health.

DoFoodSafely is designed to enable food handlers to understand how to safely work with and handle food in commercial settings.

After reading through the seven topics and answering practice questions, food handlers will be ready to do the assessment and gain the DoFoodSafely Certificate of Completion - a certificate that is well respected by the food industry across Australia.

Scan the QR code to access the DoFoodSafely course.



## ABOUT VOLUNTEERINGACT AND THE FOOD RELIEF NETWORK



**PHOTO: VolunteeringACT**

VolunteeringACT is the peak body for volunteering. We also provide community information in the Canberra Region, and we are a service provider of programs for people experiencing disadvantage and isolation, people with disability, and people needing support for mental wellness.

We represent the interests of more than 200 members, advocate for and support volunteers and volunteer involving organisations, and engage with the broader Canberra community.

VolunteeringACT coordinates and chairs the Canberra Food Relief Network, and co-chairs the ACT Food and Emergency Relief Advisory Committee.

The Network meets monthly and brings together food pantries and food relief services from across the Canberra Region to share resources, ideas, and best practice approaches.

To join the Food Relief Network, please email [info@volunteeringact.org.au](mailto:info@volunteeringact.org.au)

We believe there is great potential to leverage this network to continue to strengthen public awareness of food security and food relief issues in the region and collaboratively identify innovative solutions for addressing food insecurity for all Canberrans.

Thanks to everyone in the Food Relief Network who helped with the preparation and review of this Toolkit.

