

Media Release: Canberrans going hungry as Government considers budget

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Community sector leaders call on the ACT Government to prioritise the food relief sector in this year's budget deliberations to address the alarming rise in demand for food relief by Canberrans.

'Food relief has been a major theme of budget consultations between community sector organisations and the ACT Government. Listening to these voices from the frontline, it is clear that hunger has escalated dramatically in the last few years' said Dr Devin Bowles, CEO of the ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS).

'Our recently released [Food Relief Service Provider Snapshot](#) showed that too many people are struggling to feed their families every day in the nation's capital. We know there are many drivers for food insecurity but the time for urgent action to address this social and economic issue is now' said Ms Jean Giese, CEO of VolunteeringACT.

Wednesday's debate in the Legislative Assembly on the [Government's Food Relief Action Plan](#), highlighted that food relief is a pressing concern shared across the community and the Assembly.

'The group experiencing need has not just grown in the last decade, it has changed its nature, with an increasing number of working Canberrans struggling to feed their families. While volunteers looking after their neighbours, supported by philanthropy, might once have been enough to ensure everyone is adequately fed, the landscape has changed.

'Canberrans expect the ACT Government play an active role in funding food relief, so that no Canberrans go hungry.

'Ensuring citizens have enough to eat is one of the most basic roles of Government.

'Given the evolving economy, it is reasonable for the Government to keep planning on how best to deliver this responsibility long-term, but until that time there is a desperate need to increase funding for emergency food relief,' said Dr Bowles.

Ms Giese said that 'Two-thirds of organisations reported in our survey that they had a 25% increase in the number of people accessing their services in 2025 compared with 2024. They also reported that their key operational challenges were insufficient food to meet demand, a lack of volunteers and rising cost of food. This demonstrates only some of the systemic complexities of what the sector is experiencing and why investment is critical.

'The Food Relief Action Plan is important for the food security ecosystem and for those it supports. The sector looks forward to understanding how the government intends to address the outstanding recommendations from the condensed sector consultations conducted late in 2025,' said Ms Giese.

‘Good nutrition is one of the most important investments the ACT Government can make, especially in the context of fiscal pressure and a rapidly growing health budget. Food security will reduce much greater costs in the health and justice systems’ said Dr Bowles.

VolunteeringACT media contact: For interviews or queries, please email our Marketing and Communications team on comms@volunteeringact.org.au or call 0401 852 072.

About VolunteeringACT: We are the peak body for volunteering and provide community information services in the Canberra Region. We also deliver programs for people experiencing disadvantage and isolation, people with disabilities, and people needing support for mental wellness.

VolunteeringACT coordinates the Canberra Food Relief Network which brings together a diverse range of food relief services from large community organisations with formal infrastructure and dedicated staff to small, informal, volunteer run street pantries.

About ACTCOSS: ACTCOSS advocates for social justice in the ACT and represents not-for-profit community organisations. Follow us @ACTCOSS on X, Facebook and Instagram.

Authorised by Ms Jean Giese on behalf of VolunteeringACT and Dr Devin Bowles on behalf of the ACT Council of Social Service Inc (ACTCOSS)