

Joint Submission to the 2025-26 ACT Budget: Calling for Continuation of the Rent Relief Fund

16 June 2025

As ACT community service organisations that support vulnerable private renters, we are calling on the ACT Government to continue funding of the Rent Relief Fund in the 2025-26 ACT Budget.

What is the Rent Relief Fund?

The [Rent Relief Fund](#) gives grants to help tenants who are experiencing rental stress or severe financial hardship. A grant can be up to 4 weeks rent and a maximum of \$2,500 which is paid directly to the landlord or grantor. Grant recipients need to wait at least 12 months before they can apply again.

ACT Government funding for this scheme is due to cease on 30 June 2025.

What has the Rent Relief Fund achieved?

From 17 April 2023 to 31 March 2025, the Rent Relief Fund delivered 1,401 grants to eligible private rental households. This equates to two grants being provided every day over the past two years to households in need.

Our organisations have seen firsthand the vital role the Rent Relief Fund has played in supporting our clients. This short-term financial relief has significantly reduced stress for our clients, giving them the capacity to focus on the underlying causes of their housing instability. The loss of the Rent Relief Fund will reduce the speed and flexibility with which we can stabilise housing for clients and leave them without viable housing options.

The Rent Relief Fund has proven to be a critical part of providing wraparound support to vulnerable private renters. It has provided clients with financial support to sustain their housing as well as providing a means to connect with other supports offered through our collaborative community sector. The Rent Relief Fund has provided a means to connect clients with other services and supports provided by government and non-government agencies who we work closely with as referral partners.

One example of the significant impact the Rent Relief Fund has had for our clients is provided in a case study below.

How much does the Rent Relief Fund cost?

At an annual cost of \$1.7 million, the Rent Relief Fund represents a very modest investment in carefully targeted, means-tested financial support that has delivered a significant positive

impact for people experiencing financial hardship that has put their housing and wellbeing at risk.

The introduction of a levy on short-term accommodation from 1 July 2025 will create a new and ongoing revenue stream for the ACT Government. The levy is expected to provide \$3.8 million in 2025-26 and increasing to \$4.2 million by 2027-28. It would take less than half of this levy revenue to fund the continuation of the Rent Relief Fund.

Why do we need the Rent Relief Fund to continue?

The lack of affordable private rental and social housing properties in Canberra is a long-standing and ongoing problem for people living on low incomes in our otherwise affluent city. As long as this problem persists, we see significant value in providing carefully targeted financial relief to vulnerable private renters in our community to help them keep a roof over their heads.

As highlighted in the [2024 Rental Affordability Index](#) and Anglicare Australia's [2025 Rental Affordability Snapshot](#), the ACT is one of the least, if not the least, affordable jurisdictions for private renters living on a low income.

Commonwealth Rent Assistance is available to some low-income private rental households. However, in its [2025 Report on Government Services](#), the Productivity Commission found that the ACT had the highest rate of rental stress among Commonwealth Rent Assistance recipients. Just over half (50.3%) of these households in the ACT were still paying more than 30% of their income on rent, and over a quarter (26.9%) were still paying more than 50% of their income on rent.

We welcome and strongly support increased ACT and Australian government investment in social and affordable housing. However, there remains a significant shortfall compared to community need and population growth. This shortfall leaves thousands of low-income households trapped in an unaffordable private rental market in the ACT.

As at 31 March 2025, there were 3,189 approved applications on the ACT Government's [public housing waiting list](#). The average waiting time is currently three years for high needs housing and five years for standard housing. Based on the number of households experiencing rental stress and those on the social housing waitlist, the [UNSW City Futures Research Centre](#) has estimated that there are currently 5,400 households in the ACT with an unmet need for social and affordable housing.

Is this type of private rental relief unique to the ACT?

Most state governments provide financial relief programs for vulnerable private renters, including [NSW Rentstart Tenancy Assistance](#), [Queensland Rental Grants](#), [SA Private Rental Assistance Program \(Rent Arrears\)](#), [Homes Tasmania Private Rent Assistance](#), and the [WA](#)

[Rent Relief Program](#). In the early 1990s, the ACT Government delivered a Rent Relief Scheme through the ACT Housing Trust.

Case Study

Content Warning: Domestic and Family Violence

Bree* is a single parent aged in her early 30s. She has experienced significant emotional, psychological, and financial abuse as well as significant mental health challenges.

Bree's experience of financial abuse resulted in a period of detention in the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC). While detained in the AMC, she was supported by a community sector financial counsellor. The financial counsellor identified that Bree had been subject to years of financial abuse. In view of this abuse and related debts, the financial counsellor assisted Bree with a Safer Families Grant application and an Escaping Violence Grant application.

Upon her release from the AMC, Bree gained casual employment. She continued her engagement with the financial counselling service for budget support and managing ongoing expenses.

Bree presented to the financial counselling service with rental arrears following a period of about three weeks over the summer holiday period during which she'd received no income from her casual employment. Bree had also recently gained custody of her young child, which had resulted in increased household expenses as well as legal fees arising from the related legal matter in the Family Court.

Bree was supported to access the Rent Relief Fund so that she could settle her rental arrears and guarantee her continued tenancy which was a condition of her child custody agreement. Bree was also supported to draft a budget and set up ongoing payments towards rent and utilities, ensuring she had a financial management plan.

The financial counselling service also supported Bree to access food relief through referrals to UnitingCare Kippax, St Vincent de Paul, and St John's Care Reid; to access further Safer Families and Escaping Violence grants to help cover her outstanding legal fees; and to access a no-interest loan to maintain her car which is essential to maintaining her family and accessing work.

Through this comprehensive support, of which a Rent Relief Fund grant was a key part, Bree was able to maintain her rental property and the custody of her young child.

*Not her real name

Supporter Statements

Corinne Dobson, Chief Executive Officer at ACT Shelter said:

“The Rent Relief Fund has been a vital lifeline for renters in crisis, helping to keep a roof over people’s heads at a time of exorbitant rents and rising cost-of-living pressures. Now is not the time to be winding back targeted support for households doing it toughest. ACT Shelter urges the Government to continue funding this critical program beyond June to prevent more Canberrans from slipping into housing insecurity and homelessness.”

Dr Devin Bowles, Chief Executive Officer at ACT Council of Social Service said:

“The Rent Relief Scheme reduces pressure on Canberra’s limited social housing, so it is an amazing financial investment for the ACT Government. From a human perspective, the security of being able to stay where you live is fundamental.”

Dr John Boersig PSM, Chief Executive Officer at Legal Aid ACT said:

“Legal Aid ACT supports the continuation of funding for the Rental Relief Fund. As with many of our other community sector colleagues, our clients have significantly benefited from the assistance the Fund offers. Considering the ACT is Australia’s second-most expensive capital city to rent in, and in the context of the current cost of living crisis, continuing this funding is essential to prevent evictions and relieve financial pressure on the most vulnerable members of our community.”

Dan English, Chief Executive Officer at Woden Community Service said:

“At Woden Community Service, the Tenancy Assistance Program has seen firsthand the vital role the Rent Relief Fund has played in supporting renters across the ACT. The availability of this short-term financial relief has significantly reduced stress for our clients, giving them the capacity to focus on the underlying causes of their housing instability. Financial hardship and rental distress can be all-consuming, and without immediate relief, many people are unable to engage meaningfully in support services or plan beyond their immediate crisis.

At least 60% of the Tenancy Assistance Program’s clients renting privately have accessed the Rent Relief Fund. This support has consistently led to quicker and more sustainable outcomes, allowing clients to participate more fully in our program and build the skills needed to move forward independently.

While the Tenancy Assistance Program continues to deliver effective wraparound support, the absence of the Rent Relief Fund will reduce the speed and flexibility with which we can stabilise housing for clients. Without access to immediate financial relief, many clients face prolonged distress, which can impact their engagement in support and limit the range of viable housing options. Maintaining this fund would strengthen tenancy support services across the sector and enhance outcomes for those most at risk.”

Carmel Franklin, Chief Executive Officer at Care said:

“At Care, the Rent Relief Fund has proven to be a critical part of providing wraparound support to vulnerable private renters. It has provided clients with financial support to sustain their housing as well as providing a means to connect with other supports offered through Care’s financial counselling and other programs, including energy supports. The Rent Relief Fund has also provided a means to connect clients with other services and supports provided by government and non-government agencies who we work closely with as referral partners.”

Lucy Hohnen, Chief Executive Officer at St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn said:

"Every day, our Vinnies teams support individuals and families facing mounting rental stress. The Rent Relief Fund is often the circuit breaker that keeps people safely housed while we work with them on longer-term solutions. Without it, many of our support programs such as Vinnies Emergency Relief and Family Services Programs would have less opportunity to help people stabilise their situation and avoid homelessness. For a modest investment, this fund delivers hope to those in crisis."

Andrew Scotford, Chief Executive Officer at Canberra Institute of Technology Student Association (CITSA) said:

“Through CITSA’s management of CIT Student Accommodation we are aware that CIT students have benefitted materially from the Rent Relief Fund. It has contributed to their capacity to maintain their study and active participation in training as well as their accommodation at the same time.”

Jessi Claudianos, Director of ACT & Migrant Support Programs National Operations at Australian Red Cross said:

“It can be difficult to comprehend the lived reality of people forced to leave their homes, communities, and loved ones behind—often in fear and under unimaginable conditions. This invaluable support has resulted in many of our clients settling into secure living arrangements in the ACT. “

Contacts

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss the impact of the Rent Relief Fund and its ongoing importance to vulnerable private renters. If you would like to discuss anything in relation to this, please contact either ACT Shelter or ACT Council of Social Service who would be happy to coordinate a meeting with key community stakeholders.

Supporters

The following organisations endorse this call for the continuation of the Rent Relief Fund in the 2025-26 ACT Budget.

