

COVID-19 Information Sheet – Australian Capital Territory (ACT)

Disclaimer: The information below should not be considered an exhaustive list. Please contact organisations and services directly for the most up to date information and to enquire further about eligibility. Red Cross does not make any determinations about eligibility for any of the third-party services listed.

ACT Government Updates

- For the latest coronavirus information, including travel restrictions, border closures and other public health advice, visit the [ACT Government COVID-19 homepage](#). There is also an [email subscription option](#) to receive COVID-19 updates for the ACT, and information available in [languages other than English](#).
- **COVID-19 vaccinations:** From February 2021, the ACT will start vaccinating people in the first phase of the COVID-19 vaccination program. Vaccinating the general population in Canberra is expected to begin mid-year, in line with the national roll out. The COVID-19 vaccine will be free for all adults who want to get vaccinated. For more information on the vaccine rollout in Canberra, visit the [ACT government website](#).
- The ACT government has established a helpline to assist the community through the challenges of COVID-19. The [Helpline](#) (02 6207 7244) operates daily from 8am to 8pm.
- The ACT government's moratorium on evictions for non-payment of rent due to COVID-19 has been extended until **30 April 2021**. For full details on the scheme, visit the [ACT Justice and Community Safety website](#).
- The ACT has a number of financial supports available for people living in the ACT, including:
 - Support for people on [temporary visas](#)
 - [Hardship Isolation Payments](#)
 - Targeted support for [people seeking asylum](#)

How to stay COVID safe

- With the relaxing of restrictions, and opening of state and some international borders, Australian governments are encouraging everyone to remain COVID safe.

Physical distancing

- When and where possible, remain 1.5 metres away from other people.
- Avoid physical greetings such as handshaking, hugs and kisses.
- Take extra care if you are using [public transport](#).
- Avoid crowds and large public gatherings.
- Wear a mask when in public.

Workplaces & schools

- Follow the recommended government [health and hygiene advice](#).
- Avoid non-essential face to face meetings.
- Provide alcohol-based hand rub for all staff.
- Eat lunch at your desk or outside rather than in the lunchroom.
- Regularly clean and disinfect surfaces that many people touch
- Open windows or adjust air conditioning for more ventilation
- Stay at home if you are feeling unwell.

Employment & Work Rights

- From November 2020, relocation assistance will be available to people who [relocate to harvest and regional areas](#) to take up short-term agricultural work, including those on temporary visas, with the right to work in Australia. For more information about the scheme, and to lodge an application, [visit the website here](#).

- **Temporary relaxation of working hours for student visa holders**

Due to exceptional circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to ensure the supply of critical services, the [Department of Home Affairs and Australian Border Force](#) will take a flexible approach to student visa holders working beyond their usual work limitations, but only in specified industries.

You can work more than 40 hours a fortnight if you are:

- employed by an aged care Approved Provider or Commonwealth-funded aged care service provider with a RACS ID or a NAPS ID, before 8 September 2020
- employed by a registered National Disability Insurance Scheme provider
- enrolled in a health care related course and you are supporting the health effort against COVID-19, as directed by health officials.

You **cannot** work more than 40 hours if you are employed in a supermarket. This measure ended on 1 May 2020.

All workers in Australia have the same rights and protections at work, regardless of citizenship or visa status. Your employer must comply with Australian workplace and immigration laws, including their obligation to:

- Pay you the right pay rate for all time worked
- Provide a safe workplace.
- For information on [working](#) in Australia visit the [Home Affairs website](#).

The [Fair Work Ombudsman](#) provides education, assistance, advice and guidance to employers and employees, and can inquire into and investigate breaches of the Fair Work Act.

Food and/or Emergency Relief

- [AskIzzy](#) is a national database with links to supports including housing, food and clothing, health services, financial support, family violence assistance, and much more.
- The National Debt Helpline provides free financial advice, and [the NDH website](#) has information on topics such as rent, utilities and emergency financial assistance. The NDH is open Monday to Friday from 9:30am – 4:30pm, on 1800 007 007.
- [Community Info Hub](#) (Volunteering ACT) has a list of organisations offering free meals, laundry & showers. [You can access the list here](#).
 - Anglicare [St John's Care](#), Reid ACT
Opening Hours: 9.30am-2.00pm Monday to Friday
45 Constitution Avenue, Reid, phone (02) 6248 7771

- Anglicare [Gordon Community Centre](#), ACT
Opening Hours 10.00am-1.00pm – Monday (closed on public holidays)
10.00am-1.00pm and 2.00pm-4.00pm – Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday
110 Lewis Luxton Ave, Gordon, ACT 2906 (Opposite Gordon IGA) (02) 6284 7003
- [St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra-Goulburn](#) (Vinnies)
15 Denison Street Deakin, phone (02) 6282 2722
info@svdp-cg.org.au
- Missionworx – Griffin Centre, 20 Genge Street, phone (02) 6230 6601
Food assistance, by appointment only
- Uniting Church and Community Centre
108 The Valley Avenue, Gungahlin
- Capital Healing Rooms Inc
Unit 1, 169 Newcastle Street, Fyshwick, phone (02) 6162 1977 (*by appointment only*)
- High Street Church, 49 High Street, Queanbeyan
Ph: (02) 6297 3472 on Tue, Wed, Fri between 9:30 and 14:30 (*by appointment only*)
- Uniting Care Kippax Corner
Luke Street & Hardwick Crescent, Holt, phone (02) 6254 1733
- Church of Christ – 2 Marrawah Street, Lyons
Mondays, 13:30 – 14:30
- Woden Community Services – 26 Corinna Street, Woden
The Little Pantry, *Thur* 9:30-10:00

Rent and Utilities

- The ACT moratorium on evictions for non-payment of rent for COVID-19 has been extended to 30 April 2021. It prevents tenants who were impacted by COVID-19 from being evicted based on arrears that accrued before or during the moratorium, on the condition that they pay rent as it falls due during the transition period. For full details on the scheme, visit the [ACT Justice and Community Safety website](#).

[Legal Aid ACT – Tenancy Advice Service ACT](#) (TAS):

- ACT Tenancy Advice Line
 - The tenancy advice line is a free, confidential phone service that connects you to a paralegal who can offer legal advice and assistance on a range of tenancy matters.
 - **Tenancy Advice Service phone number:** [1300 402 512](tel:1300402512)
 - **Email:** TAS@legalaidact.org.au

- Tenancy Advice Live Chat - For those who are unable to contact us on our phone line service, but would still like to discuss their issue, we have an online live chat service that will connect you to our staff. <https://tawk.to/tasact>

[Summary of changes for tenants and occupants- COVID19](#)

ACT Civil & Administrative Tribunal (ACAT) Resources:

- [Problems Paying Your Utility Bills?](#)
- [Pamphlet about Hardship Assistance](#)

Hardship programs and financial difficulties in ACT

- Find information from:
 - [Care Financial Counselling](#)
 - [Salvation Army Financial Counselling](#)
 - [No Interest Loan Scheme \(NILS\)](#)
 - [ACT Government Utilities Concession Information](#)
 - [Australian Energy Regulator](#)
- Find major retailer hardship program information at:
 - [ActewAGL Retail Staying Connected](#)
 - [Origin Energy Power On](#)
 - [Energy Australia EnergyAssist](#)

[COVID-19 Household utilities and concessions](#)

- Households already receiving the Utilities Concession will receive an additional \$200 rebate through their electricity bill. This will be applied automatically to the next electricity bill in June or July 2020. You do not need to contact your electricity supplier.
- **Eligibility:** Centrelink Pensioner Concession Card holders, Centrelink Low Income Health Care Card holders and Veteran's Affairs Pensioner Concession Card or Gold Card holders.
- The government will also contribute up to \$250,000 to a fund to assist households severely impacted by COVID-19. Details on the fund will be determined in consultation with retailers, who will be asked to make a co-contribution in order to access the fund.

[Care and Financial Counselling Service](#) provides financial counselling support that may be of assistance to individuals who are struggling to pay rent or utilities.

Housing / Homelessness

- [Onelink](#) provides information about and connection to crisis accommodation and other support services for people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, 1800 176 468
- [Catholic Care](#) provide specialist homelessness services in Canberra and surrounding regions.
- [Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services \(MARSS\) Australia Incorporated](#) is a homelessness service for people seeking asylum and families with uncertain immigration status. Phone: (02) 6248 8577 / Email: info@marss.org.au
- [Supportive Tenancy Service](#) provides outreach support to people in housing stress, or who may be at risk of homelessness, regardless of the reason for their circumstances.

Health and Medical Care

- [COVID-19 – access to medical care](#). The ACT Government has announced that during the COVID-19 pandemic, Medicare ineligible people requiring testing, treatment or other public health supports related to COVID-19 will have free access to medical care. This includes pathology, diagnostic, pharmaceutical and outpatient care in the ACT public health system.
- People seeking asylum are entitled to full medical care including pathology, diagnostic, pharmaceutical, and outpatient services in the ACT's public hospitals without being billed. See: <https://www.health.act.gov.au/search?search=asylum%20seeker>
- People seeking asylum have the same access as Health Care Card holders, to public dental and community health services, with the possibility of incurring a cost. See: <https://www.companionhouse.org.au/asylum-seekers/>
- [Companion House Assisting Survivors of Torture and Trauma](#). In addition to counselling, Companion House provides general practice and primary health services for refugees. The service is also available to asylum seekers with complex needs. Phone: 02 6251 4550
- The [Refugee Health Guide](#) includes programs staffed by refugee nurses, doctors and other specialists that operate nationally, providing specialised mental and primary health care and service coordination to refugees and people seeking asylum. Information on referral pathways in ACT is found [here](#).
- [Reciprocal Health Care Agreements](#): Agreements with 11 countries that covers the cost of medically necessary care for visitors in Australia. Those visiting Australia from the following countries may be eligible for medical care under Medicare while in Australia, information for each country is available [here](#).
- To support older people from culturally diverse backgrounds, the Australian Department of Health has funded the Multilingual Older Persons COVID-19 Support Line. The support line will run for six months from 10 February 2021 until 31 July 2021 will be offered in the following six languages – Arabic, Cantonese, Mandarin, Greek, Italian & Vietnamese. For more information visit the [PICAC Alliance website](#).

Information for the LGBTQI+ community

- Information on health and counselling services, social groups, legal support, multicultural specific services, and other services can be found on this [national LGBTQI+ directory](#).

Information for International Students in ACT

- October 2020: The Australian Government has recommenced granting student visas. If you do not yet have a student visa, you are encouraged to apply for a visa and commence your studies online, so that when borders re-open you can travel to Australia to continue your studies. For the latest information, visit the [Study Australia website](#). A general advice line is available by phoning 1300 981 621.

- **Australian National University** held a number of community forums throughout January, regarding the return of staff and [students](#) to campus. Recordings of all the forums are [available on the ANU website](#). Also available are guidelines for [Campus Protocol](#).
- **University of Canberra** has [information](#) on interstate travel, COVID-19 testing sites, and [support services for students](#).
- The [UCX Food Pantry](#) has a partnership with Canberra Relief Network to provide food hampers for students. Students should register before 12:00pm on Mondays. Other [support for students](#) is available on the website.

Information for New Zealanders living in Australia

New Zealand citizens in Australia on a Special Category Visa (SCV) may be able to access a range of payments, depending on their circumstances.

- Those who came to Australia prior to 26 February 2001 generally have protected status and have the same access to all Australian payments as permanent residents and Australian citizens, where eligible, including JobSeeker Payment.
- New Zealanders who came to Australia after 26 February 2001 and have non-protected status can access family payments, such as FTB, paid parental leave payments and childcare subsidy, where eligible. If they have been continuously living in Australia for at least 10 years since February 2001, they can also access JobSeeker Payment or Youth Allowance for a one-off period of up to six months.
- New Zealanders on an SCV may be eligible for the JobKeeper Payment if they meet the qualifying criteria, <https://treasury.gov.au/coronavirus/jobkeeper>.
- New Zealand citizens may also be able to claim the Age Pension or, in limited circumstances, Disability Support Pension or Carer Payment, under the Social Security Agreement between Australia and New Zealand.
- For further general information:
<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/subjects/payments-visa-holders>
- Individuals needing specific advice on their circumstances should contact Services Australia:
<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/contact-us>

Additional Support for People Seeking Asylum and Refugees

- If you have a Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) or Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV), you are eligible to apply for the [Special Benefit payment](#). Click the link for more information.
- [Status Resolution Support Services](#) (SRSS)
 - The SRSS program supports people who are awaiting a government decision on a visa application, including people seeking asylum. It provides temporary support for people facing significant barriers who are unable to support themselves.
 - In ACT & NSW, the SRSS program is delivered by:
 - [Life Without Barriers](#) Ph 02 9508 4100 (Rockdale) / 02 8830 7601 or 02 8830 7602 (Parramatta) / [1800 935 483](tel:1800935483) / info@lwb.org.au
 - [Settlement Services International](#). Contact information is [here](#).

- [Humanitarian Settlement Program \(HSP\)](#)
 - HSP is a national program funded by the Australian Government to help refugees to establish themselves when they first arrive in Australia.
 - People granted the following visas are eligible to access the HSP on arrival:
 - Refugee (subclass 200, 201, 203 and 204) visa
 - Global Special Humanitarian (subclass 202) visa
 - Other visa holders are also eligible to access the HSP, but only to receive [Specialised and Intensive Services \(SIS\)](#). These include:
 - Protection (subclass 866)
 - Temporary Protection (subclass 785), Temporary Humanitarian Stay (subclass 449), Temporary Humanitarian Concern (subclass 786) and Safe Haven Enterprise (subclass 790).
 - SIS is a component of the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) available to humanitarian entrants and other eligible visa holders who have complex needs:
 - [HSP Service Provider Locations](#)
- [Multicultural Hub Canberra](#) provides SETS Migrant Settlement Services for newly arrived (5 years) migrants & humanitarian entrants in the ACT & SE NSW. Migrant Settlement Services include information & referrals for Centrelink, employment, accommodation, education, health services and any other matters related to settlement.