Minister for Business and Better Regulation
Question Time Briefs
May 2021

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ACT Government

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

CM2021/1253

Portfolio/s: Business and Better Regulation

ChooseCBR Digital Discounts Program

Recent media summary

- "ChooseCBR vouchers scheme to press on despite a lukewarm reception", *RiotACT!* 14 April 2021 (link).
    - The article refers to a Government spokesperson reiterating that the December 2021 ChooseCBR release was a trial to inform the full roll out of the program later in 2021.
    - It references comments from Ms Castley MLA and Ms Lee MLA which are critical of the impact of the scheme, including its administration costs and engagement with businesses run by members of the Culturally and Lingsuitically Diverse Community.

Talking points:

- The ChooseCBR digital discounts program is an economic stimulus measure targeted at hospitality, tourism, arts and recreation, and some personal services sectors, all of which have been significantly affected by COVID-19.
- The $2.5 million program is an important element of the Jobs and Economic Recovery Plan.
- Registrations opened on 23 November 2020, and the trial of the program ran from 9-24 December 2020. The trial saw nearly 48,000 customers sign up to redeem vouchers at 336 participating businesses.
- Over $310,000 worth of vouchers were redeemed across the 16 day trial, driving a total economic spend of over $1.9 million.
- There was a wide range of businesses that took part in the program, ranging from gymnastics clubs to cafes and a wide range of retail stores. I was pleased to see a strong representation from our multicultural business community.
- We learnt a lot from the trial and the feedback we received from customers and businesses, as well as data gathered throughout the trial.
- The assessment of the trial, feedback from participants and data was important to inform how the full program is rolled out.
- For example, the Government is considering how ChooseCBR can be promoted, eligibility criteria for businesses and the best time of year to release vouchers that will have the greatest benefit for local business.

Cleared as complete and accurate:	07/04/2021	
Cleared for public release by:	Executive Branch Manager	
Contact Officer name:	Morgan Campbell	Ext: 50931
Lead Directorate:	Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development	

- ChooseCBR is open to a broader range of sectors than similar programs in other states and territories (including the MyDarwin program on which ChooseCBR was based).
- For example, the NSW Dine & Discover program is limited to hospitality and entertainment industries, while Tasmania's Make Yourself at Home travel voucher program is limited to accommodation and experiences.
- The 2020-21 budget allocated $2 million for this program. This full amount will be offered as vouchers.
- The initial allocation for the trial was for $500,000 and included $123,000 for administrative and operational expenses . This will support both the trial as well as the full rollout of the scheme. It has funded the one-off establishment costs of the program and will continue to fund its ongoing delivery.

Businesses owned by those with a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse background

- Businesses were not asked to identify as being owned by individuals from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds when registering for Choose CBR.
- However, of the **top ten** businesses in terms of number of vouchers redeemed, **at least five** of these are multicultural in their offerings and likely ownership.
- During the trial, information about ChooseCBR was displayed on the ACT Government COVID-19 website and could be viewed in multiple languages.
- The ACT Government also contacted local business organisations and stakeholders in the multicultural community about ChooseCBR, including the Multicultural Advisory Council, National Multicultural Festival stakeholders, and those on the multicultural E-News circulation list.

Key Information

- During the trial, eligible businesses needed to:
    - Have a physical shopfront in the ACT;
    - Have a turnover under $10 million;
    - Have received JobKeeper payments at any stage during 2020; and
    - Be within the retail, tourism, hospitality and arts and recreation sectors as per a list of approved ANZSIC codes.
- Through the trial members of the community over the age of 18 accessed up to $40 worth of vouchers each day to spend at eligible businesses that have signed up to the program.
- The vouchers could discount a maximum of 25 per cent of an eligible transaction, meaning that for every $1 the ACT Government invests in this program, businesses will receive at least $4 in revenue. Through the trial, we were pleased to see the multiplied spend was roughly $6.30 per $1 of Government investment.
- Vouchers could not be used for the sale of alcohol, tobacco, or gambling products.

Background Information

- The ACT scheme is closely modelled on the MyDarwin initiative that has been implemented in the City of Darwin and is supported by a similar ICT system.
- Strong uptake on the first day of registrations and redemtpions caused some technical issues. These were resolved quickly.

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COVID-19 Support for Business

Talking points:

To support local small businesses and local jobs, a range of initiatives have been delivered:

- **Canberra Business Advice and Support Service:** The ACT Government has extended the Canberra Business Advice and Support Service for another 12 months, giving businesses free access to expert advice on a range of topics. This provides local businesses with up to four hours of free expert advice tailored to their business in a partnership delivered with the Canberra Business Enterprise Centre (CBEC).
- **Skills Canberra** supports ACT registered training providers by paying 50 per cent of Australian Apprentice or Skilled Capital course fees upfront.
- **Infection Control Training Fund** of $1.34 million, based on a 50:50 co-contribution by the Australian and ACT governments. The Fund is providing 3,800 fee-free infection control training places to ACT customer-facing workers. Funding is prioritised for those working in the retail, tourism, transport and logistics, hospitality, cleaning, security service, aged and disability sectors.
- **CBR Innovation Network (CBRIN)**: In June 2020 the ACT Government provided $607,000 to CBRIN to deliver support to business and academia and drive economic recovery. This funding includes two COVID-19 specific streams of the Innovation Connect grant program and scholarships to fully subsidise the CBRIN Idea to Impact Program for fifty entrepreneurs.
- **Priority Investment Program – Jobs and Economic Recovery Round:** In September 2020 the ACT Government announced the $1 million Priority Investment Program – Jobs and Economic Recovery round, which was later supplemented by a further $1 million from the Future Jobs Fund.
- The program's current funding round resulted in six shortlisted projects from 22 expressions of interest. An independent panel has assessed the shortlisted projects and an announcement on the successful applicants will be made soon.
- **COVID-19 Local Business Commissioner** Brendan Smyth advocates on behalf of businesses in negotiations with landlords, and refers them to relevant Government help.
- The ACT Government has offered a range of financial supports to businesses over the course of the pandemic, including rates relief, payroll tax waivers and deferals, stamp duty relief and land tax credit.
- The ACT Government has also waived licence fees for food business registration, outdoor dining, and liquor licensing.

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

Key Information

- **Rates relief:** In 2020-21 average rates for commercial properties with an average unimproved value of $2m or less did not increase.
- **Rent reduction support:** For commercial properties, until 31 January 2021, landlords of properties with an average unimproved value of $2m or below, with tenants who had been directly impacted by COVID-19, could apply for rent reduction support if they reduced rent for their tenants. Support was provided based on a tiered category system.
- **Payroll tax waivers/exemptions:** Have been available for businesses unable to trade or only operate on a very limited basis, due to ACT Government health-related restrictions, on wages paid between September 2020 and June 2021. Prior to this, a six-month payroll tax waiver on wages paid from March to August 2020 had been provided to businesses directly impacted by National Cabinet's 'prohibited activities and venues' list.
- **Payroll tax deferrals:** ACT based businesses that have an Australia-wide wage bill up to $10m can defer their 2020-21 payroll tax, interest free, until 1 July 2022.
- **Construction** firms could defer their payroll tax liability for six months from April until September 2020.
- **Stamp duty relief:** The ACT Government is offering concessions for contracts exchanged between 4 June 2020 and 30 June 2021. No stamp duty for single residential dwelling blocks; no stamp duty on off-the plan units up to $500,000; and an $11,400 reduction in stamp duty for off-the-plan units between $500,000 and $750,000.
- **Food business registration, outdoor dining, and liquor licensing fee waivers:** Food businesses which have prepaid their license will automatically have it extended for an additional 12 months, until 31 March 2022. General licensees received an additional 12 month waiver until 30 June 2022. Applications fees for obtaining commercial liquor permits and amending these permits were waived for 12 months from 25 March 2020 to 24 March 2021, where businesses could provide takeaway sales.

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Cleared for public release by:	Executive Branch Manager	
Contact Officer name:	Guy Bromley	Ext: 72371
Lead Directorate:	Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development	

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Background Information

- **CBEC** is required to provide 750 hours of advice to ACT businesses in the 12 months leading up to 25 March 2022, on a broad range of business related topics, including financial and legal advice and human resources. All CBEC advisors also have foundational mental health training.
- **CBRIN**: The ACT Government announced it will provide $100,000 in funding over four years to expand CBRIN's reach to CIT Tuggeranong and the University of Canberra in Belconnen. Implementation will be subject to budget funding.
- **PIP**: The Priority Investment Program (PIP) provided $9.75 million over three years in the 2018-19 budget to facilitate collaboration and, through matched funding, activate these assets to create long term wealth and wellbeing through economic diversification and growth in jobs.
- In 2018-19, $5.2 million was committed to five projects across agri-technology, renewable energy, space and cybersecurity sectors.
- In 2019-20, $2.1 million was commited to three projects across the space and biodiversity and biosecurity sectors.
- In 2020-21, in response to the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on the economy, the PIP funding round was focused to provde direct support towards jobs and economic recovery. $1 million of PIP funding was supplemented with a further $1 million from the Future Jobs Fund, bringing the total funding support available under this round to $2 million. Formal announcements on the outcome of this round are expected to be made soon.

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ACT Government

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

CM2021/1256

Portfolio/s: Business and Better Regulation

Amp It Up! Fund

Talking points:

- On 21 April I announced direct support will be offered to local live music venues to help them continue to recover from the impacts of COVID-19.
- The support will help grow opportunities for local musicians and other performance artists to get back on stage, and give Canberrans and visitors even more great live entertainment options throughout 2021.
- The ACT Government *Amp It Up!* Fund, worth $700,000 will assist small to medium sized live music venues to recover by offsetting the costs associated with performance programming and promotion, offering live performance and music lovers an exciting calendar of gigs from June to November 2021.
- The funding round opened on 3 May and closes on 17 May. Venues will be supported by Music ACT to apply for funding.
- An information night was held on Friday 30 April and was attended by 22 venues.
- The funding has been welcomed by the sector.

Key Information

- The *Amp It Up!* Fund is $700,000. There is an additional $40,000 for Music ACT to assist administration of the program and $10,000 for a Night-time Economy Forum to be held later in the year.
- Venues should be able to demonstrate that they regularly host live music or other gig performances, and/or have history of hiring acts, and/or have a dedicated performance and audience space.
- Venues can apply for a grant through the *Amp It Up!* fund to meet 100% of their expected costs between 1 June 2021 and 30 November 2021 for engaging artists and technicians and up to 50% of their marketing and promotion costs.
- MusicACT will assist in the administration of the fund and support local venues in their applications and programming.
- As part of the assessment criteria, at least half of the acts programmed by venues for this fund will need to be local acts, ensuring that we are continuing to provide opportunities and paid employment to local artists.

Background Information

- It is likely the Fund will support between 20 and 30 venues.

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Contact Officer name:	Kate Starick	
Lead Directorate:	Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development	
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- Gang Gang Cafe & Bar in Downer is one of a number of live music and performance venues who can now apply for the funding.
- Sam, from the venue said, "This is a massive lifeline for us to be able to continue offering opportunities to the local artists that we've grown up with or come to know by being involved in the local music scene." (quote from Our Canberra