Minister for Business and Better Regulation
Question Time Briefs
April 2021

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QUESTION TIME BRIEF

CM2021/1245

Portfolio/s: Business and Better Regulation

ChooseCBR Digital Discounts Program

Recent media summary

- "Business eligibility may be relaxed for next round of ChooseCBR vouchers", *Canberra Times* 24 February 2021 (link).
  - The article referenced discussions during Budget Estaimtes hearings on 23 February 2021.
  - It referenced comments and questions by Ms Castley MLA that were critical of the scheme's business uptake and the administration costs.

Talking points:

- The rollout of the full scheme is a decision of ACT Government. I will provide more information regarding the ChooseCBR Digital Discounts program in the near future.
- 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.

Cleared as complete and accurate:	15/03/2021	
Cleared for public release by:	Senior Director, Economic Recovery and Strategic Policy	
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Lead Directorate:	Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development	

TRIM Ref: CM2020/927

- 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.
- 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.

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.

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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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Portfolio/s: Business and Better Regulation

COVID-19 Support for Business

Talking points:

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

- **ChooseCBR:** The $2.5m ChooseCBR digital discounts program is a stimulus measure targeted at business sectors which have been significantly affected by COVID-19. In the 9-24 December 2021 program trial period, nearly 48,000 customers signed up to redeem vouchers at 336 participating businesses.
- Over $310,000 worth of vouchers were redeemed to support purchases worth $1.9 million. The ACT Government has listened to feedback about the trial period, including the need to market the program to a wider range of businesses across all parts of Canberra and widening certain eligibility criteria to allow more businesses to register.
- **Canberra Business and Enterprise Centre (CBEC)**: The Canberra Business Advice and Support Service started during 2020 and provides up to four hours free advice to Canberra small businesses, and at subsidised rate after that with uncapped hours.
- **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. CBRIN is now expanding its offering to Belconnen and Tuggeranong.
- **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.

Key Information

- **Rates relief:** Commercial property owners/tenants with an Average Unimproved Value below $2m have been afforded a range of reliefs, including a $2,622 fee reduction (equivalent to the annual charge) and option for deferral of all payments until 1 April 2021.
- **Payroll tax waiver:** A six-month payroll tax waiver has been made available to businesses which can demonstrate that their operations have been severely limited by COVID-19. It requires an application form, and businesses need to continue to lodge payroll tax returns. For those businesses completing annual returns, which were due on 21 July 2020, their tax will have been calculated at a rate of 25% of tax payable. **JobKeeper** subsidised wages are also exempt from payroll taxes, and **new apprentices** were made exempt from payroll taxes until 31 January 2021.
- **Payroll tax deferrals:** ACT-based businesses that have an Australia-wide wage bill up to $10m will be able to defer their 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; an $11,400 reduction in stamp duty for off-the-plan units between $500,000 and $750,000.
- **Land tax credit:** Available to landlords that reduce rent on privately rented properties by at least 25%, with the ACT Government covering 50% of this reduction, up to a maximum of $1,300 per quarter.
- **Rideshare vehicle license fee waiver:** Rideshare vehicle license fees, including re-registration for operators which ceased services as a result of COVID-19, is waived from 1 April 2020 for 12 months; operators which have prepaid will have their licence expiry date extended by 12 months. Roadworthy inspections are also waived providing one has been completed within the past 9 months.
- **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. There are multiple relaxations for liquor licensing; including for on and off licensees with sales <$3m in the previous reporting year. There were options to provide takeaway sales until 31 December 2020 for businesses which normally operated an on-sales model.

Background Information

- **CBEC** is required to provide 750 hours of advice to ACT businesses in the 12 months leading up to 22 March 2021, 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. CBEC signed a new contract with the ACT Government for a further 12 months commencing 26 March 2021.
- **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.

Cleared as complete and accurate:	15/04/2021	
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TRIM Ref: CM2021/1245