

PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

NSW GOVERNMENT'S MANAGEMENT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

QUESTION

My next question is to Commissioner Fitzsimons and that is about the role of Resilience NSW in providing grants to organisations that are not currently funded by the Government. Obviously, there are some amazing charities feeding a lot of people and working extremely hard, all on volunteer money. I know that there is money going to Foodbank and some of the larger food charities, but it is clear that the need is dire. The organisations have raised with us that, yes, there are some grants available but they are fairly patchy. They have been competitive and very few dollars have actually hit them but meanwhile they are trying to get thousands of food hampers out the door every week and the call from the community is growing. Can you explain the role of Resilience NSW in particular in relation to the food issue and food security across the city?

Commissioner FITZSIMMONS: Yes. Thank you for that question, Ms Sharpe. Resilience NSW works very closely and is incorporated under the emergency management arrangements, so working very closely in a supportive role particularly in response to the State Emergency Operations Controller [SEOC], Deputy Commissioner Worboys and Commissioner Fuller, of course, and in partnership with Health. So we have a role fulfilling administration and support to the State Emergency Operations Centre [SEOC] arrangements and then particularly when it comes to relief and support, particularly food relief and personal care relief, we partner with a range of other organisations, principally the Department of Communities and Justice [DCJ], organisations like Multicultural NSW in particular with a focus area around local government areas [LGAs] in the Sydney Basin, together with key non-government organisations, like Foodbank, as you mentioned, and of course OzHarvest, but a range of other local community organisations.

We also have representatives operating at what we call the Regional Emergency Operations Centres [REOCs], which come under the control of people like Assistant Commissioner Tony Cooke where we have got the whole of government and non-government organisations working closely with local councils and their community partnership and community organisations to pull together insights and understandings around needs and priorities, and we have been successful in the last months securing a considerable amount of additional funding, many tens of millions of dollars, in support of things like food supplies, other personal care and support services and packages, sponsoring assistance around grants administration and grant support programs.

We have not necessarily taken money on board as an agency, Resilience NSW, but we have sponsored and supported and partnered with other key agencies to get the case framed up, the need identified, and the Government endorsing those enhancement packages, and they are principally channelled through agencies like DCJ and, of course, Multicultural NSW; and, particularly given the focus of the LGAs in the Sydney Basin, we have put primary leadership of a lot of the community-based grants and programs in with Mr La Posta and Multicultural NSW to ensure that we were providing the enablement, the facilitation and the support to those local identified community organisations, community leaders and those existing networks that were working through the emergency management [EM] arrangements and indeed the local council support arrangements.

To give you a rough idea, in the last couple of months I think we have done more than 4,500 tonnes of produce into the focus LGAs and other parts of New South Wales—a considerable uplift in recent months, particularly since the Delta variant has spread. We have been maintaining those strong

relationships with organisations like Foodbank and OzHarvest over the last 18 months with routine distribution. In support of Health, Health accommodation, where people are positive or close contacts who may need specialist accommodation, we provide food support and relief and other personal care products—sanitary products, self-care products and what have you. We are also providing emergency relief products, such as sanitation wipes and other things.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Can I—

Commissioner FITZSIMMONS: Ultimately, through that network, we are able to leverage other partner organisations to make sure that is going where it is needed and where it is prioritised and in a way that is appropriate to those local areas. So food packs, for example, we identified food packs as being broadly wrapped up into four or five broad categories: You have got the Anglo packs, the halal packs—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Sorry, can I just stop you there? Thank you, Commissioner Fitzsimmons. That is helpful. Would you be able to provide on notice, and this may be for you, Mr La Posta as well: I would like to know how much extra money has been provided and to what organisations since June this year. If you could provide that on notice, that would be great.

Commissioner FITZSIMMONS: Yes, and I am sure Mr La Posta could give you a really simple outline right now of how many millions of dollars have been channelling out already.

ANSWER

Multicultural NSW has administered the following grant funding:

- Community Support Grant Program \$748,000
- Crisis and Essential Services Support for Temporary Visa Holders Grant Program \$750,000
- Multicultural Media COVID-19 Support Grants \$2,000,000
- Emergency Relief and NGO Support Grant Program \$5,500,000
- Empowering and Supporting Local Communities Grant \$3,400,000
- Empowering and Supporting Local Communities Grant \$3,600,000
- Partnership Grants to the NGO and Community Sector \$10,000,000
- Office of Local Government Partnership Grants \$3,000,000
- COVID-19 Innovation Grants \$1,150,000

The CHAIR: Mr La Posta, we have had some positive feedback about the work of Multicultural NSW, and I want to reflect that back towards you. But we have also had some very real concern about the fact that the funding that has been offered has been on a competitive model and that especially for multicultural groups there has not been any significant funding to those groups provided to date. We had groups like the Arab Council and Turbans 4 Australia saying we are now three months into this lockdown in western Sydney and they still have not received any direct funding.

Mr LA POSTA: Yes.

The CHAIR: I will give you an opportunity to respond to those concerns now.

Mr LA POSTA: I can confirm that Turbans 4 Australia very recently, as of last week, received a small \$5,000 grant to help them sustain their food packages and hampers. The Lebanese Muslim Association [LMA] also, we just signed the agreements last week and that money was paid into their account to help support them to continue to do similar sorts of exercises. To Ms Sharpe's question of Mr Fitzsimmons before, Mr Shoebridge, we have provided support in the vicinity of \$750,000 to emergency support for asylum seekers and to specialist NGOs to help asylum seekers be able to be housed, clothed et cetera—food and all of those things. I just need to note that the asylum seeker piece is not actually a State responsibility, but as residents of New South Wales we stood up and filled that gap. We have provided funding to 150 community organisations through COVID grassroots support grants. We have spent \$2 million on multicultural media agencies—exactly the point that you were alluding to before—to help sustain them and make sure that they do not close their doors, because we know they are a critical channel for print, radio, non-traditional media forms—all of those different things to help the messaging get out around staying at home or around vaccination. We have invested a further \$5.5 million to provide wraparound supports to temporary visa holders and asylum seekers as well. We have just closed and are just finalising the approvals for a grants program which is in excess of \$3 million to provide grants of between \$10,000 and \$30,000 to small-scale organisations exactly like the ones you named before and many, many more. We received over 256 applications for that grant program. The grant program was open the minimum amount of time. The processing times—we are trying to turn these things around in less than week, to be able to get sign-off and get that money into the pockets of the people that need it as well. Once we close that grant program, we will then open up another grant program very similar to help support, now that we have gone beyond the 12 LGAs into a broader statewide focus as well. My hope is that we will open that grant program next week. In addition to that, we are just finalising an expression of interest process for NGOs to provide those wraparound services that you and Ms Sharpe spoke about before to individuals, within families within western Sydney and right across Sydney, that need that nuanced accommodation concern [audio malfunction].

The CHAIR: I think Mr La Posta may have frozen.

Mr LA POSTA: [Inaudible].

The CHAIR: You froze briefly there, Mr La Posta.

Mr LA POSTA: I am sorry. I am hoping that [disorder].

The CHAIR: —at the word "concern".

Mr LA POSTA: Ten million dollars, did you hear that bit about the NGO funding?

The CHAIR: No, you froze at the word "concern".

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Are we moving on shortly?

The CHAIR: Indeed. Had you finished, Mr La Posta?

Mr LA POSTA: I was just saying that there has been a number of grant programs and I can provide all of that detail on notice, and we are about to open another whole round of grant programs as well to continue to sustain the community organisations.

ANSWER

I refer to my answer on pages 31 and 32 and the answer to the previous question.