

Tara Cheyne MLA

Manager of Government Business

Attorney-General

Minister for Human Rights

Minister for City and Government Services

Minister for the Night-Time Economy

Member for Ginninderra

RESPONSE TO QUESTION ON NOTICE**Questions on Notice Paper No 4****21 March 2025****Question No. 210****MR CAIN:** To ask the Minister for Human Rights —

1. In what timeframe can victims expect to hear back from Victim Support ACT regarding financial assistance funding applications.
2. Is there a statutory timeframe for responses referred to in part (1).
3. How many responses to the Victim Support ACT Financial Assistance Scheme have been provided within (a) 30 days, (b) 60 days and (c) 90 days.
4. How do the wait times, referred to in part (3), compare to the national average.
5. What are the criteria for receiving the Financial Assistance Scheme.
6. On what grounds can the Financial Assistance Scheme be rejected.
7. What is the referral process from Victim Support ACT for neurodiverse victims of sexual, emotional or physical abuse.
8. On what grounds can an application to register an Assistance Dog in the ACT be rejected.

TARA CHEYNE MLA - The answer to the Member's question is as follows:

1. [In what timeframe can victims expect to hear back from Victim Support ACT regarding financial assistance funding applications?](#)

The Financial Assistance Scheme (FAS) receives over 100 new applications for financial assistance each month. This number continues to increase. FAS aims to be responsive to applicants and efficient in assessing applications. Engagement with applicants can and does take a variety of forms, the timeframes for responses from FAS depend on the type of response or communication, and the type of application.



It is standard practice for FAS to send a letter of acknowledgement to applicants once an application has been received. This acknowledgement letter provides the applicant with their application number, some information about the application process, and some contact information for FAS and for other support services offered by VSACT.

FAS may need to contact applicants throughout the assessment process, especially where clarification or further information is required to assess the applicant's claims, or where the applicant's circumstances have changed. The timing and frequency of this engagement is heavily dependent on (a) how much information and what kind of further information is required, (b) what changes there have been to the applicant's circumstances, and (c) whether and to what extent the applicant is engaged with other agencies.

It is also difficult to provide a single or simple timeframe for decisions about the financial assistance applications. First, FAS is required by the *Victims of Crime (Financial Assistance) Act 2016* (the Act) to prioritise applications for immediate needs ahead of applications for non-immediate needs payments (s 42(2)). This means that the timeframes for immediate needs applications is shorter than for non-immediate needs applications, as these applications are appropriately triaged. However, the timeframe for applications being assessed will be heavily dependent on whether all of the required evidence has been obtained by FAS, including quotes or invoices that need to be provided by the applicant.

In addition, it is very common for FAS to assess all parts of an application where the required information has been received, but not other parts, which are assessed later. For example, a person's immediate needs payments may be paid, but the applicant may not have had the opportunity to provide information about the economic loss payments that they are seeking. It is also sometimes necessary to partially assess an application where an applicant's circumstances require it, or where expenses arise over a period of time.

2. [Is there a statutory timeframe for responses referred to in part \(1\).](#)

There is no stated statutory timeframe, but ss 33 and 42 provide for circumstances where the action must be taken as soon as reasonably practicable.

3. [How many responses to the Victim Support ACT Financial Assistance Scheme have been provided within \(a\) 30 days, \(b\) 60 days and \(c\) 90 days.](#)

See response to Question 1.

4. [How do the wait times, referred to in part \(3\), compare to the national average.](#)

Because the ACT scheme differs to schemes operating in other jurisdictions, it is not possible to provide a direct comparison. Further, those jurisdictions that administer financial assistance through an administrative scheme do not publish specific wait times.

5. [What are the criteria for receiving the Financial Assistance Scheme.](#)

The eligibility criteria for receiving financial assistance are set out in s 46 of the Act.

6. On what grounds can the Financial Assistance Scheme be rejected.

Taking this question to mean “on what grounds can an application to the Financial Assistance Scheme be rejected?”, the requirements for granting financial assistance are set out in the Act. Applications may be refused if they do not meet the eligibility requirements, and particular payments may be refused if they fall outside the prescribed categories in the Regulation, or there is not sufficient evidence to satisfy FAS on the balance of probabilities that the claimed expense is a result of the act of violence.

In addition, s 45 of the Act provides a number of disqualifying circumstances.

7. What is the referral process from Victim Support ACT for neurodiverse victims of sexual, emotional or physical abuse?

This question has been interpreted as relating to the support offered to neurodiverse victims in their engagement with Victim Support ACT (VSACT). Where appropriate, nearly all of VSACT clients are already engaging with external disability specialist agencies. In the small number of cases where that engagement is not occurring and seems appropriate, VSCAT identifies this during their intake conversation and offer a warm referral to an appropriate agency.

VSACT recognises the importance of early identification and responsive support for victims of crime who are neurodivergent, particularly those who have experienced sexual, emotional, or physical abuse. At the earliest opportunity, VSACT seeks to identify whether a client may have a disability and works collaboratively with the client to determine which reasonable adjustments will best support their engagement with our service.

VSACT has an identified Disability Justice Liaison Officer (DLO) who provides dedicated support to victims of crime with disabilities, including those who are neurodivergent. The DLO also offers consultation and guidance to colleagues across the service to ensure consistent and inclusive practice. All staff receive mandatory disability awareness training, with regular refreshers to reinforce inclusive approaches and build confidence in supporting people with diverse access needs.

For clients who are neurodivergent, VSACT implements a range of reasonable adjustments tailored to the individual’s needs. Common adjustments include:

- Transcription or written summaries of meetings and phone conversations to aid processing and recall.
- Reminder text messages, emails, and phone calls to support executive functioning and appointment management.
- Consideration of sensory needs, such as minimising background noise, adjusting lighting, or offering alternative meeting environments (e.g., quiet rooms or remote meetings).
- Flexibility in communication style and format, including visual supports, plain language, and the use of augmentative or alternative communication methods where appropriate.
- Offering breaks during meetings or interviews, particularly when discussing distressing content, to support emotional regulation.
- Allowing support persons to attend appointments and meetings where preferred by the client.

- Avoiding unnecessary urgency and providing clear, step-by-step explanations of processes, timelines, and expectations.

VSACT is committed to trauma-informed and neuroaffirming practice, recognising that neurodivergent individuals may experience and express trauma differently. VSACT works to ensure services are adaptable, respectful, and accessible, with a focus on empowering clients to exercise agency and choice in their recovery and justice journey.

8. On what grounds can an application to register an Assistance Dog in the ACT be rejected.

An application to accredit an assistance animal may be rejected if the application provided is not in accordance with the criteria set out in Division 5.2 of the *Domestic Animals Act 2000*.

The ACT Assistance Animal Accreditation Framework is voluntary and clarifies and promotes access rights for people who use an assistance animal. Rights of an assistance animal and their handler are protected under the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act, regardless of whether they have an accreditation issued by the ACT.

Approved for circulation to the Member and incorporation into Hansard.



Tara Cheyne MLA
Minister for Human Rights

Date: 5/5/25

This response required 6 hours and 25 minutes to complete, at an approximate cost of \$640.72