

MEETING SUMMARY

Human Services and Health Partnership Implementation Committee.



About the HSHPIC COVID-19 Response Group Meeting

During these unprecedented times, vulnerable communities are at higher risk of illness, poverty, violence and disadvantage and the community sector is facing high demand, and workforce, safety and sustainability challenges.

The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) and Department Health and Human Services (DHHS) have agreed to bring together community sector peak bodies and government in an expanded HSHPIC to strengthen engagement and planning around the COVID-19 response and recovery.

The HSHPIC COVID-19 Response Group is meeting fortnightly. An informal summary will be published following each meeting.

You can learn more about HSHPIC [here](#).

What was discussed 12 May 2020

DHHS update for funded agencies

The Victorian Government as part of the response to coronavirus is seeking to ensure people look after their own, and others' health, wellbeing and social connection. Government has reviewed the physical distancing rules and there is a new fifth reason for people to leave home; to visit family and friends (while maintaining physical distancing). The other reasons to leave home have not changed, and are to:

- shop for food and other necessary goods and services
- access medical services or provide caregiving – for example, this includes shared parenting obligations or providing care and support to an unwell, disabled, elderly or pregnant friend or relative
- attend work or education where you can't do those things from home
- exercise and participate in some recreational activities adhering to the rules.

Government have made additional announcements about the reopening of schools. Prep, Grade 1, Grade 2 and Year 11 and 12 classes, and staff in specialist schools, will be teaching face-to-face from Tuesday 26 May. Other year levels will return to on-site schooling from 9 June.

DHHS advised that joint VCOSS and DHHS webinars will be continuing monthly. The next webinar will also include representatives from Department of Education and Training and Department of Justice.

DHHS also provided an update on a recent funding package to make sure people with disability get the support they need. The package includes funding for disability advocacy services, disability liaison officer in health services, Home and Community Care for younger people and additional funding to support the transition of services helping people with psychosocial disability transition to the NDIS. Funding will also help small not-for-profit disability services with infection control, business continuity and police checks.

This announcement also included additional funding for respite for carers at this time, which was acknowledged and welcomed by Carers Victoria.

Working for Victoria

The Department of Jobs Regions and Precincts (DJPR) and VCOSS provided an update on the Working for Victoria Fund, a new time-limited initiative announced by the Victorian Government as part of its economic response to COVID-19. The \$500 million initiative helps Victorians, including people who have lost their jobs due to the economic impacts of coronavirus (COVID-19), find new work opportunities.

VCOSS is working with community service organisations to develop proposals that meet the needs of employers and the sector. They are working closely with specialist peaks in this work.

DHHS is also engaged with the initiative through DJPR and VCOSS, and is assisting with the provision of specialised workforce insights, helping identify training needs, and assisting DJPR with the assessment of funding applications.

If possible, proposals for the Working for Victoria program should be submitted by 18 May. However, if organisations plan to submit a proposal but need a bit more time, appropriate arrangements can be made. DHHS and VCOSS will be proactively reaching out to sectors where only a small number of applications have been submitted, to identify any potential other needs.

DJPR, DHHS and VCOSS are working closely together, with DET, the Future Social Service Institute and Trades Hall to coordinate and streamline the rollout of the program.

Community service employers should contact Deb Fewster at VCOSS or Sarah Broadbent at DJPR in the first instance to discuss their proposals.

E-mail Deborah.fewster@vcoss.org.au or sarah.broadbent@ecodev.vic.gov.au

DJPR will try to respond to all proposals within one week, but timelines may be longer if they receive a significant number of applications on 18 May.

Public health and sector planning

As we continue to slow the spread of coronavirus, cautious easing of restrictions has been announced for certain areas. The latest Chief Health Officer directions allow group-based community support services like Alcoholics Anonymous to meet with up to 10 people while practising physical distancing. Planning is currently underway to ensure workplaces are COVID-19 safe when we eventually return to more face-to-face service delivery.

Organisations must develop and put in place Workplace COVID Safe Plans to help keep staff, visitors and service users safe as restrictions ease. This will involve organisations undertaking risk assessments of where and how transmission might occur.

DHHS are considering ways to support the sector in this planning, which may include development of appropriate templates and guides.

HSHPIC members noted the many ways the sector's work has been disrupted, including new providers entering the market, a reduction in volunteers, and new workers transitioning to the sector. These will all need to be considered in planning.

Making Social Housing Work

Members of the Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance advised they are launching a refreshed report on *Making Social Housing Work*. It sets out a 10-year framework to supercharge investment in social housing. It calls for 6000 new social housing units each year for 10 years, including 300 Aboriginal housing units and a range of associated support for people.

The report seeks to align and influence the work the Victorian Government is considering to stimulate the economy. The group has been engaging with the Building and Development Industry Taskforce about the opportunity to ramp up social housing construction.

Links and resources and information

The [DHHS Funded Agency Channel](#) is a central source of information. It includes new information about:

- [COVID-19 Factsheets for Aboriginal patients, staff and cultural safety](#)
- [Updated guidelines for homelessness service providers related to COVID-19](#)
- [COVID-19 Care services and Child and Family Services FAQs](#)
- [Family Safety Victoria QandAs for service delivery during COVID-19](#)

Kind regards,

Argiri Alisandratos

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