



## 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 30 April 2020?

### [DHHS update for funded agencies](#)

The interim supply bill passed the Victorian Parliament last week. Further information about lapsing contracts will be provided soon.

The [Hotels for Heroes program](#) has been expanded to include some community service workers. Hotels for Heroes provides free accommodation in hotels or apartments for frontline workers who have had exposure to coronavirus or have a positive coronavirus diagnosis and cannot safely self-isolate at home. Staff working in disability supported independent living, public residential aged care, Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations and primary care settings are now eligible for free accommodation to self-isolate under the expansion.

### [Food relief](#)

The State Relief and Recovery Team (SRRT) has been undertaking planning for food relief to support vulnerable people throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The SRRT is also considering

how to preserve the capacity of organisations that provide food relief and ensure long term system sustainability.

To help inform this work a survey has been prepared for the emergency relief sector. The survey has been distributed widely across the community services sector. It is open until 11 May.

Representatives from the Department of Education and Training (DET) reported on the work that is taking place to sustain the School Breakfast program. There are 700 schools involved in the program and the Department is seeing examples of local innovation to get food to students.

### **Support for ethnic communities**

The Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV) reported that culturally and linguistically diverse communities have experienced barriers to accessing critical public health information. There have been challenges in the timely production of translated information. DHHS materials are now available in 49 languages. ECCV noted the need for information to be available in additional communications formats, such as videos.

Culturally and linguistically diverse communities have also experienced barriers to accessing support. International students and people seeking asylum are amongst the groups precluded from accessing COVID-19 Commonwealth financial assistance. ECCV recently convened a forum with local councils, food relief organisations, unions and other community groups to unpack the issues.

This week's [announcement by the Victorian Government](#) of a support package for international students was welcomed.

The Victorian Government:

- is ensuring that State-based supports have a broad criteria for eligibility, to ensure 'non-residents' can access services.
- a number of recent funding announcements have incorporated dedicated funding for culturally and linguistically diverse communities – see, for example, the new family violence funding package.

There are persistent concerns about racism, linked to COVID-19. The Victorian Multicultural Commission is leading conversations about this issue.

## Family violence risk and workforce supports

In a joint presentation, Domestic Violence Victoria and Family Safety Victoria provided a brief overview of current family violence risks and workforce supports available during COVID-19.

FSV provided a brief update on MARAM training and the revised approaches away from face to face learning. The CFECFW are in the final stages of adapting the MARAM face-to-face Brief and Intermediate and Screening & ID training modules for online webinar style delivery. This will be rolled out to child and family services, alcohol and other drugs, mental health and homelessness workforces in May, with late May delivery of Screening and ID to Care Services and MCH services. It is anticipated 5000 workers will be trained via this approach by late 2020.

A short overview was provided of the recent government announcement of \$40.2 million over two years for crisis accommodation and specialist support for people experiencing family violence and sexual assault.

FSV will send around further details about the training and workforce options and would welcome advice and feedback from HISPIC members given current workforce needs.

## Education system update – support for children at risk of schools disengagement

DET reported on the distribution of devices to vulnerable students, to mitigate the risk of digital exclusion as students are encouraged to learn from home during term 2. Parents and carers still have some concerns about access to learning, and the Department is particularly attuned to concerns about vulnerable student cohorts – for example, Aboriginal students, students in the Out of Home Care system, students with disabilities, and students who undertake their education in community settings (re-engagement programs).

DET advised that its regional offices are working closely with individual parents and carers to address concerns about student attendance/engagement. The Navigator program is still operating. 800 psychologists and GPs have been working to pivot their approach, so that as much of the health and wellbeing support as possible can be sustained at this time. DET is aware of a likely surge in demand for wellbeing and engagement support through the recovery phase of the pandemic, and will have a dedicated focus on this on return to school.

DHHS is also working at a local school level, and with the National Disability Insurance Agency, to ensure students with disabilities are having their needs met at this time.

**Links and resources and information**

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

- [A funding package to support vulnerable children and families](#)
- [Telehealth: privacy and security](#)
- [Support for new parents: advice for child and family services](#)

Kind regards,

**Argiri Alisandratos**  
HSHPIC COVID-19 RESPONSE  
GROUP CO-CHAIR (DHHS)

**Emma King**  
HSHPIC COVID-19 RESPONSE  
GROUP CO-CHAIR (VCSS)