



## **COVID-19 Update for Community Service Organisations**

Dear all

The Department of Communities (Communities) is continuing to work closely with the Commonwealth and other State and Territory governments to respond to the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

Communities values its relationships and partnerships with peak organisations and the community services sector in Western Australia. Together we have a crucial role in providing support and advice to people to help them cope throughout the COVID-19 outbreak.

We understand the far-reaching impact the spread of COVID-19 is having across the community and we acknowledge the preparation and planning that the community services sector has undertaken to ensure service continuity. We understand many of you are modifying your practices where possible, keeping people safe whilst on your premises and complying with the principles of social distancing.

At a national level, First Ministers exchange information daily to keep on top of the rapidly evolving situation. The WA Government continues to work collaboratively with the Commonwealth and other State and Territory governments to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Communities is working with other government agencies to provide a consolidated and consistent approach. This includes the Mental Health Commission, which many of you also work with.

### **Communities' approach**

- Communities has established an Incident Management Team to lead our response to the COVID-19 outbreak in WA. This team is coordinating our response at a whole of Communities level so that we can continue to effectively provide services to the people we support.
- A number of taskforces are being established to identify and implement practical measures that help protect vulnerable cohorts and provide guidance based on what is currently known about COVID-19. Guidance and support will be updated and communicated as needed, and as further information becomes available.
- The taskforces will work with community sector representatives to address the specific needs for our vulnerable Western Australians including:
  - people experiencing or at risk of homelessness
  - Aboriginal people and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations
  - people with disability
  - people experiencing or impacted by family and domestic violence
  - children in care
  - seniors
  - residents of remote communities.

- These taskforces will support and complement response planning that is already being undertaken by peak organisations and community service providers. The work of these groups will help to ensure the needs of high-risk cohorts and populations are well understood and taken into consideration in the development of a response plan.
- A high-level risk assessment is being undertaken of community services contracted programs. We intend to work closely with the peak bodies and community services sector to create a shared understanding of the impact and risks.
- The outcomes of the assessment and accompanying scenario planning will help determine risks and the level of impact on service provision; and identify high priority services and supports needed to assist vulnerable cohorts.

Disability Services Ministers across Australia met on 18 March to establish priorities for people with disability and their support workers and families. Senior representatives from disability service providers, advocacy bodies and Communities met on 19 March to identify priorities, including lines of communication for service providers, people with disability and others we support.

We understand that service providers are concerned about what the current situation means for service agreements held with Communities. The Department of Finance will be communicating with the sector soon regarding current service agreements and any disruptions to service delivery that may impact the capacity to provide essential services. The most recent Funding and Contracting Bulletin can be found at <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/document-collections/community-services-publications>.

If your service is disrupted or ceases to operate at any time, please contact your Contract Manager.

We will keep you updated about our planning and response in this rapidly changing environment with further detail about the taskforces to be provided in the coming days.

### **Keeping up to date**

- National Coronavirus Health Information Line: 1800 020 080
- [Federal Department of Health](#)
- [WA Department of Health](#)
- [World Health Organization](#)
- Updated advice from the Premier of WA can be found at <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/coronavirus-covid-19>.

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