



Tuesdays at Twelve webinar series

Part One: 14 April 2020 video transcript

Introduction

Department of Communities Director General Michelle Andrews hosts an insightful six-part webinar series that examines topical issues with special guests.

This is the transcript for the first webinar in the series, which features the Director General, the WA Council of Social Service (WACOSS) President Deborah Zanella and Mental Health Commissioner Jennifer McGrath, who discuss the State Emergency Welfare Planning, community engagement and citizen wellbeing.

Transcript

Speaker: Michelle Andrews, Director General, Communities

Good afternoon, everyone.

Welcome to Department of Communities' first – the first of quite a few, we believe – Tuesdays at Twelve, a webinar series that we hope is going to be really helpful for you.

We know it's going to be helpful for us.

This is most definitely a series that's going to be interactive.

We're going to be looking for feedback from you during the webinar presentation today, but also afterwards. And we want to hear from you about what you want to hear in the series going forward. So, please make this your own.

Today, I'm joined in the room with Deb Zanella and Jen McGrath. We've also got some technical people helping us here. If there's going to be some clunkiness, it's because it is our first, so please bear with us, but also give us the feedback on what's going to work better for you.

Formally, I want to acknowledge, pay my respects and also my heartfelt appreciation to the Traditional Custodians of the land where all of us are today, throughout our magnificent State.

We've got more than 100 of you dialling in at the moment and it's fantastic you've joined us. On your behalf, I am acknowledging the Traditional Custodians, wherever you are



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around Western Australia. And paying respects to Elders, past, present and, of course, the emerging leaders that we all work with.

In doing that, I want to also give some context for you about where we're meeting today, for those of us in the room; it is 189 Royal Street, Department of Communities' head office.

We're in the conference room that the Communities Leadership Team meets in on a regular basis. So you're going to see some things on the wall around this room. It really speaks to some work that the Leadership Team has been doing with our Aboriginal leaders in our organisation and also with our Cultural Advisory Group that we set up, established, and invited to come and work with us late last year.

So, you're going to see some quotes and some language that can be confronting, but to know that what's it about, it's about Department of Communities becoming a more culturally competent organisation. And, if you want any more information around this project, this process that we're working through, I'm very happy for myself and my team to speak with you about it separately. But I just wanted you to understand why these things are up on the wall. They're very important and it's a work in progress for us as a department.

Now, what I'd like to do is I'm going to sit down, and you can see Jen McGrath and Deb Zanella are here with me in the room, and we are going to work through giving you some information at the front end. And then, at the second half, we would like that to be very much some questions and answers – to the extent we can; we hope we can – coming from you during the session today.

But, to also know that any of the questions that you ask, that you put to us that we don't get to today, we'll be addressing those in our frequently asked questions that we're going to be publishing on our website and on our internal Common that we use for all of our staff, and reaching out to all of you in your organisations. So the commitment from us is, anything we hear from you today, we will be following up if we don't address it directly, either in the front end of our presentations or in the Q and A section.

What we thought would be helpful for you today is, because this our first one, is really, for me, I wanted to speak to some of the principles that have been informing the work we've been doing in responding to COVID-19. And then step into, importantly, the activation of the State Emergency Welfare Plan just over a week ago.

Deb and Jen are going to give you an update from their perspectives around the COVID-19 response. And then, we're going to move into some Q and As from you. So, we'll be opening up the opportunity for you to put questions in, but you might want to hold off on that until we've given you some information, because we might actually answer some of your questions in the front end.



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So... And, just a reminder who we all are. So, myself, Director General of the Department of Communities, Deb Zanella, President of WACOSS, and Jen McGrath, Commissioner, Mental Health Commission. And a team supporting us, who'll be feeding us some of the questions for this in the second half of the section, in the room here.

So, we go first on to the activating of the State Welfare Plan. But, to stand back from what is a busy diagram – and I will go over some of the content of it. And I mentioned the principles that have been informing the work that we have all been doing since COVID-19 became a very real issue sitting in front of us.

Not all that long ago, although everyone's sense of time through this process has been completely warped. I would say for us at Department of Communities, it's probably only been in the last six weeks, eight weeks, where the realisation for us that COVID-19, for us as an organisation, we need to completely reorientate ourselves – to be speaking to that very significant issue and what lays ahead.

Without really knowing what that means for us, we needed to completely reorientate ourselves as a department.

But, in doing that, the principles that we've always been working to have become all the more important. And I wanted to just flesh those three key principles out for you today before I speak to this diagram.

One is about working in partnership.

Some of you've heard me speak before, have heard me say; when I signed up for this job 12 months ago, I could never have done that without thinking that I was one of a huge partnership.

This is a big, complex challenge in this role, leading the Department of Communities, supporting some of the most vulnerable in our State.

Well, that has only got even more challenging with COVID-19. So, the importance of working in partnership and all that means, about recognising the different skills and capabilities we need in those partnerships, grounded in respect for each other, transparency and openness. And in general terms, just every day supporting each other with the challenges that lay ahead.

So, the working in partnership is fundamental to me, personally, it is to my organisation and it is informing how we are responding to COVID-19. And hence, Deb and Jen being at this table and have been in partnership for at least the last month – a really meaningful partnership.

Secondly, for me, since I've taken on this role, and again it is all the more important, is the Aboriginal lens – the cultural lens we need to put across everything that we do.



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Aboriginal people are overrepresented in the vulnerable cohorts that we support, and we know there's much that we do that is not culturally appropriate and, in the end, does not deliver the outcomes that all of us are committed to in terms of Aboriginal people and communities.

We have some extraordinary Aboriginal leadership in this State and within my Department. So, my commitment through COVID-19 is that everything we do needs to have that cultural lens and accountability to Aboriginal people built around it.

So, that is the second principle for me in responding to COVID-19.

And then, the third one is about integrity.

Of course integrity is important. We all know that, and all of us in the leadership roles that we have – whether we're in government, whether we're in the not-for-profit sector, whether we're in the private sector – you know the importance of integrity in governance.

Well, it was never more important, and never found to be so wanting, than in the matter at the end of the year for my Department that was exposed, in terms of the corruption by a senior leader in my Department. And corruption that had been going on for many years.

We're still responding to that, and the determination of us in our response to that is as strong as it has ever been. And, we've been implementing significant changes in terms of governance, financial controls, transparency and accountability. Those things will continue at pace and, in fact, some of them are accelerating in a COVID-19 environment.

But what that comes with is a determination – in a time where we have to be agile, we have to make faster decisions: we cannot let our standards slip in terms of governance, in terms of integrity.

Already, the confidence in outside parties, in my Department, has to be rebuilt.

And so, my determination is to use this process, COVID-19, to be part of that rebuilding.

And so, we will not be wavering on standards of governance, accountability, transparency and integrity through this process.

So, those are the three principles underpinning our response over the last four, six, eight weeks.

And, now we got to the activation of the State Welfare Plan.

For those of you that have been involved in emergency management previously, you'll be aware that the emergency management framework in this State has very clear roles and responsibilities and various mechanisms that will get activated, as and when they're required.

And so, we know the state emergency process was activated some time ago.



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Chris Dawson was appointed as a State Emergency Coordinator. And, at a similar time, the activation of the hazard management response, the pandemic response, Dr Andy Robertson; we've all got to know him very well in the last month or two as well.

What an extraordinary job Andy, Chris and Russ heading up Health have been doing through this process, and we're seeing that in the very real – and I cannot say enough – the results we've seen in the last week around how that is paying dividends in ways we'll never probably even fully understand. But the very low rate of community transmission at this stage.

All of those roles were activated some time ago.

A decision was taken a week or so ago to activate the State Welfare Plan.

And what that means is that I take on a formal role as the State Welfare Coordinator.

It means a State Welfare Emergency Committee is to be established, supported by State Welfare Incident Coordination Centre.

All of those things mirroring things that are happening in the Department of Health world, and over in the coordination world that Chris is overseeing, but we bring that welfare lens to the response.

And again, the importance of partnerships, the importance of the cultural lens sitting over this, the importance of integrity – absolutely front of mind in how we set ourselves up to respond to this.

Over recent days, we've been finalising the terms of reference for the State Welfare Emergency Committee and with proposals for membership around all of that.

What I will highlight for you is that the State Emergency Welfare Plan goes back to 2016, and so while the elements of it are still completely transferrable into a COVID-19 environment, there are aspects to it which do need to be reworked. Because a lot of the expectations are that we're responding to a much more local event, or regional event, whether it's bush fires or cyclones. And, of course what we're dealing with here is not only a state, this is a global issue and we're one State operating with a whole many layers of complexity.

And so, our task right now is to set up a state welfare response in a way that is fit for purpose for COVID-19. So, the membership of the Committee needs to be appropriate for that, but we also need to adapt it as we go as well as new issues may emerge, and we're seeing that with COVID-19. One week does not look like the next. Many things are changing.

We've had an Incident Management Team that's been operating for some time. That is going to transition to the Incident Control Centre. And similarly, we established the



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vulnerable cohort taskforces some weeks ago. They've been invaluable up to this point. I know some of you have had some role to play in contributing to those and I thank you. Again, making a reading, as we did early in the piece, about who are those vulnerable cohorts that we need to keep front of mind, that we need to be focused on in terms of how we're responding to emerging issues and needs.

And lastly, I'll draw you over to the Department of Communities.

And I know that across the community services sector, you'll be doing exactly the same thing.

We have had to, while recognising we have our traditional structure – if I can frame it that way – still operating, and all the formalities that go with that and the accountabilities. Sitting above our structure now is a repurposed Department of Communities around COVID-19 and the key elements of that. And I've got leaders supporting each of these functions.

Community services need to be much more coordinated and connected to all the services being delivered, whether it's into mental health, whether it's not-for-profit sector – so taking a whole-of-sector view to community services. And what are the issues, the challenges that are coming up? PPE (personal protective equipment) would be one of those. Working together on addressing those emerging issues that we're all dealing with.

Economic and social recovery, resilience – I've got another team, leading on that; they're taking a whole-of-sector view, working very closely with Treasury, working very closely with Finance, our central agencies. And really knowing there's the immediate response piece. But right now, we need to be looking at those questions of sustainability, resilience, recovery. And so a team leading on that piece of work.

I've already talked about governance and integrity and not letting standards slip around that.

And, communications, goodness me, what do communications look like in a COVID-19 environment?

So, here we are, kicking off a webinar series. Like many things that I am doing, and I suspect you are, I'm asking – Gee, why did we not do these things before?

I now know what (Microsoft) Teams meetings are, albeit, I don't class myself as an expert. Zoom meetings, I've learned about how to do those over the weekend. There are many ways in which we are needing to communicate differently in this environment, and all of us are being challenged. But it's presenting opportunities for us into the future as well to be much more effective in our roles, but needing to take a whole-of-sector view around all of



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those – wrapped around the cultural piece that I've talked about. And the critical role that our Cultural Council is playing – advising us, challenging us, holding us to be accountable.

So, as a Department of Communities, we have completely refashioned ourselves to speak to this. And, that is the challenge that has come to us from my Ministers, from the Premier. And you will hear the Premier speaking that way to all of you; to the private sector.

We all have opportunity to refashion the resources, the capabilities that we have to speak to COVID-19. And we've been seeing that happening across the board. In fact, the appetite for doing that – "How can I help?" being the most common question – has been overwhelming and humbling.

Just to take a dive-in a little closer to the State Welfare Plan activation – you don't need to get into the details of this, but to know it does mean a significant stepping up in terms of the Coordination Centre. And I hope this gives all of you some, both visibility and comfort, and to know that that steps us into the space around what does the intelligence gathering, the data collection, the analysis need to be to support good decision-making?

What is the planning we need to be doing, both in terms of immediate response, sustainability, resilience, recovery, all of those pieces?

I've mentioned the stepping up of the media, the communications, in what can only be called, you know, a priceless, priceless moment. All of us learning new things in that space. Logistics are just critical, but looking at the logistics through a much wider lens and bringing capabilities in that help us with that.

Thinking differently about procurement, about commissioning and so on. Supply chains – all the things that are going to be critical in this welfare piece.

Operations. There's been a huge amount of work going on in our Incident Management Team. I never thought about the Department of Communities being involved with the managing of people off cruise ships; people arriving, people exiting this State, and working hand-in-glove with the Health Department, with Police, to support that process. All of which is signalling new cohorts of vulnerable people coming our way, of course.

And, at the bottom of that operations piece, regional and remote communities.

How significant it has already been for us in our response. And I can only congratulate the people that have been making those decisions. The importance of taking this approach – for our State, the diversity of our regions, the size of our State – has never been unimportant, but has informed those decisions that have been taken in this initial response to COVID-19.

We always should be different in how we think about our State. The diversity is marvellous. We have to respond in a way that is regionally appropriate. And then, of



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course, the remote communities and the enormous work that's gone on already in assisting people in returning to communities, but not just leaving them there.

The pandemic plans that have been developed for those remote communities, the planning around the resources they need to be set up, well, we know they're one of the most vulnerable cohorts.

How do we ensure they've got the support, the services they need to work through this process? So, the operational piece here has to be particularly relevant to this Western Australian context.

And, I've started to talk about recovery and safety across everything that we do.

So, that's a close look at some of the functions sitting under that Incident Control Centre, which is your Incident Control Centre.

Moving on to, I mentioned the State Emergency Welfare Plan, written in 2016. Some revision's being made to it now, which will be considered by that Committee at its first meeting when it's established.

Here's just a little bit of what's, effectively, a summation of what sits in that plan that speaks to the responsibilities. And it basically gives Communities a state agency responsible for coordinating that welfare piece, which we normally always do. But they're normally, as I said, bushfires and other such things, which feel a lot more straightforward in this current context.

How we interface with the other parts of Government is crucial, but most importantly, how we work with those outside of Government – the community services sector being critical, but also many other private sector organisations and peaks that are stepping up and offering their assistance.

What are welfare services anticipated to be in that plan? We've got things listed there. We think that list is going to be tested – and is already being tested – that it's not complete, if I can put it that way, in terms of what our support is going to need to look like in COVID-19.

So, we're updating that plan and taking that to the first meeting of the Committee, which will either be at the end of this week or early next week.

Next slide; that's it now.

So, that's my attempt at framing the principles that have been underpinning our response to date. The activation of the State Emergency Welfare Plan.

I'm going to hand over to Jen and Deb in a moment for them to give you an update, but there was one extra piece of information that I think you're all going to be wanting some visibility over.



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The work that's been going on to support the sector has very much been informed by what's been coming through the taskforces, but also there's the work that you don't have as much visibility over. Which is really around what does the response need to look like? And how can we do that across Government?

A couple of critical areas have been, in relation to PPE I've already mentioned.

There's been a huge amount of work going on across Government and with the community services sector to firstly just get a voice in the discussion about PPE.

We know the priority that needs to be given to hospitals and all the people working in that health environment and the importance of PPE.

Equally, we've been working very hard to give voice to community support workers, frontline workers in our space that we are responsible for, that we come to work every day to support. PPE is going to be critical.

The work that's been done in the last couple weeks will come to fruition, I think, later this week, and we're going to have a very clear decision tree around accessing PPE that really speaks to the fairest functions that get performed in my organisation, in yours.

And also the advice that needs to sit around that; really good health advice about the practices that we need to be using or supporting our staff to use that mitigate risks.

And so those two elements, being where the work's been focused and you will see the result of, I expect, later this week. So thank you to everyone who's contributed to that.

Secondly, we've been hearing loud and clear the pressures COVID-19 is putting on the community services sector. And I've mentioned and skated across the everyday activities, the challenges of how to sustain through this process. And some of the response from Government is going to be about how we help leverage different access to different resources. Some of it's going to be around investment.

Now, you don't have as much visibility of the processes going on with that. We're obliged to work across Government and to central agencies, but I want to give you reassurance that there are very good processes happening that are being informed by what's coming through the taskforce, that is being informed by the data that we're collecting about emerging issues across the sector.

And that Government is listening and responding.

You've already seen some responses in terms of commitments out of the Department of Finance around contract extensions.

There has already been the work that's been going on around the ERO (Equal Remuneration Order), and you can expect over coming days finalisation of the decisions to



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be made around the original ERO decision and to also give you the commitment that, in the contract extension process, we will, of course, be looking at the ERO and how that plays out. And we know there are still some outstanding questions sitting in that space. So, that work is ongoing – contracts, ERO and so on.

We also know that COVID-19 has just brought new pressures and challenges for all of you and we are working with our Ministers, with Treasury, with ERC (Expenditure Review Committee) to look at where their priorities are around investment, but also, as I said, where there are opportunities to liberate resources from elsewhere – to repurpose current investments, to realign and reprioritise in a COVID-19 environment. So that work is absolutely going on.

By having Jen and Deb in those discussions, I can't tell you how important that is. Also, to mention what decisions DPC has taken to appoint specialist advisors within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, who also bring voice to these issues.

In particular, some of you'll be aware, Sue Ash has to be regarded as a State Treasurer.

I think Sue has been appointed some weeks back to advise around this world that we work in, and working very closely with Glen Kelly, bringing Indigenous perspective and also to Taron, who's bringing that health expertise as a former Chief Health Advisor.

So, just some extra information from me on what is happening in terms of listening to and responding to the issues being faced in your sector. So, I am now going to hand over to Jen and Deb.

Speaker: Jennifer McGrath, Mental Health Commissioner

Thanks, Michelle. And good afternoon, everyone.

Look, I'm not going to cover off too much, because exactly, Michelle's given a really good outline of how the Department of Communities is working across the community sector.

Just to say that the Commission is also working on various similar principles and a way of working, including collaboration and working in partnership.

And as Department of Communities has, the Commission has reorientated its services to ensure that we're very focused on the highest risk areas, and so we can actually really be responsive in this time of crisis.

And including the taskforces that have been developed, that includes a mental health, alcohol and drug taskforce, so working very closely with Communities around that.

I'll just say one other thing, which I guess is the focus for the Commission – intensive mental health, alcohol and drug.



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As most of you would know, that presentations to EDs (emergency departments) and inpatient beds are really down at the moment and that might sound full on. But on the face of it, we all know that that means that people that are quite unwell are in the community trying to live as well as they can. And what that does mean is that we know that we need to: one, support our community services, our current community services in the community, as much as we can to work in a COVID environment. And, secondly, how can we expand services where we can to support that increased need in the community when they're not in hospital?

And also in the, just, general impact that COVID's having to the whole of population, where, you know, our cohort – the people that we were trying to support for this crisis – is now larger.

So that's sort of, you know, from the Commission, focusing on those two things – keeping up current services working as much as we can, and expanding, where possible, the other services to support people.

So I might leave it there, Michelle.

Speaker: Michelle

That's okay.

Speaker: Deborah Zanella, President of WACOSS

Okay, thank you. And, just quickly, I'd just like to acknowledge we are on Wadjuk Noongar land and to all the lands in WA where people are meeting today.

I think, two things or two areas, from a service user perspective, the people that we serve, in terms of my contacts throughout the sector. You know, I'm conscious of hearing, you know, concerns around people not having safe... Sorry, I'll work out where I'm looking [laughing]. People having safe places to go and to reside is a key issue for them. Obviously, people who experience isolation, generally because of their mental health are struggling with this new way of interacting with their support workers and the impact it's having on escalating mental health. We're very conscious of that.

I think in the, certainly in the family domestic violence space, we're certainly quite concerned in our coordinated response teams around the increased number of calls to police stations about, you know, women and children who are not able to leave their home because of issues of isolation.

Obviously, issues of food and basic necessities keep being raised through our service users, the people that we work with. I've seen a question already, but the question of



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where we've got congregate living and how we manage isolation, both from clients and a services sector use are coming up as well.

You know, and the other thing I think when Jen was talking about, you know, the prevention of escalating into the hospital. The other commentary we have from some of our clients, particularly in the space of homelessness, is being frightened to get into ambulances. A, either because of the fine or B, because somehow, they'll, you know, predominantly because of the financial impact that will occur.

So, we know that there's a lot of fear and uncertainty within the population that we serve and our response to service providers.

Michelle's picked up on some key sector concerns obviously around PPE, and I do acknowledge the work that's been done across government departments. It is public, it has felt like herding cats, the issue of PPE and finance, have worked really, really hard to try and bring some uniformity to that and I think, anything that happens this week, with some guidelines, will be absolutely welcomed by the sector.

We've mentioned the taskforce, and there is a tension between the expectations of taskforce and what Government can respond to and respond in a way that is timely in relation to what people are assessing as urgent needs; it's a tension that I constantly talk to Michelle and Jen about. And I think the other thing I've noticed that, you know, I've seen some really great responses from the sector in terms of initiatives like Doorstop Dinners through The Freo Group, in responding to community need as well.

So, you know, I want to kind of confirm Michelle's opening statements about wanting to work in partnership together and I think that is the desire and commitment of all of us. I think we come from different starting points, and often those points will cause tension, but I do believe in the commitment to actually work for a unified approach, to actually solving COVID as well. So, I'll go with related to questions about that, there's too many [laughing].

Speaker: Michelle

So, the team here are going to help us look to some of the questions that you've been feeding through. Should we just go off the list that's up on the screen there?

Speaker: Helen Reid, Leadership Adviser, Communities Leadership Team

Would you like me to read them out?



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Speaker: Michelle

Yeah, so – Helen.

Speaker: Helen

Yeah, so the first one, overcrowding in properties is an issue. As a remote area, we are concerned as to how people can isolate or quarantine in these conditions. So the question is, how can Communities assist with addressing these concerns?

Speaker: Michelle

So I'm always asking people, you tell us what you need us to do [laughs].

What I can tell you, there is work going on with a very rapid assessment of properties that we hold around the State, and there have been properties identified that can be refurbished in a relatively quick and straightforward way to assist with the overcrowding challenge. So that's one of the steps that Communities is taking at the moment, and obviously we're open to other proposals.

I know there has been work going on to look at unused resources being held by private sector organisations as well. We're building an inventory of those, so, but very much hearing the voice from people on the ground, from communities through the local emergency committees and the district leadership groups about where the opportunities lay to address those overcrowding challenges.

I really think that's going to be the most powerful way to get pragmatic solutions to these types of challenges.

Speaker: Deborah

And I think, to that, some of the work that's been done in the accommodation processes, I know some parties have gone out to view properties. I also know that we've sent through, from a sector perspective, our links in regional areas. So for example, in Port Hedland, about what opportunities for existing properties that could be re-utilised in that space as well, so I'll give that some thought and prepare me to continue to send those through.

Speaker: Michelle

Yep.

The next question.



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Speaker: Helen

Yeah, the second question is focusing on youth issues; so neglect, crime, education are high priority for our community, but are magnified with COVID. What support can Communities provide organisations to address these, reducing the impact on the whole community?

Many NGOs (non-government organisations) have stopped or reduced face-to-face contact. There have been education strategies put in place, but these young people often reside with older family members and AOD (alcohol and other drug) issues are prevalent. This increases risk in those vulnerable communities.

Speaker: Michelle

So, statement of a problem – what's the response look like in this moment? Jen, Deb, did you want to speak to...

Speaker: Deborah

I think the issue for, I mean, certainly in youth, but areas where NGOs have stopped face-to-face services, it does create a flow on impact and I'm not sure that we actually know the response to that, outside of – you will have some solutions as to how that might look better and how that might actually work.

Speaker: Jennifer

I know one of the things that we are looking at is how we can expand some of our youth services. We're probably lacking in them in good times, so, but understanding maybe some of the services we do provide, how we can expand those too, in this period of time and have more wrap-around services for more of those young people that are in families that are struggling with other issues as well. Even in particular, alcohol and drugs, which is probably going to be worse over this crisis as well.

Speaker: Michelle

Some of those services operate with limited hours, so certainly looking at expanding hours, expanding the actual numbers of people involved, and so it's one part of it. The use of technology, but also just to just broadly point to that is one of the taskforces that we've established. And so, if you know that anyone that wants to feed information, intelligence, suggestions into the process, please do use the taskforce that we've established.



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Speaker: Helen

I've got a question here from Luke, who's firstly thanking you all for the information session, but his question is – when will the welfare services, the ones, Michelle, that you spoke about, be available to support people affected by the COVID situation? And, how you link in to SWEC (State Welfare Emergency Committee) and access-based services?

Speaker: Michelle

So, services are available now; basically, I think is that there are already services available.

What we are doing is responding and adapting, so literally on a daily basis, to emerging issues.

So, I could run you down through those welfare services that are listed there. We've been delivering those services from the get-go around, as I said, people getting off cruise ships. Not normally what was normally considered in the scope. And people are returning from overseas and going into quarantine, and then people leaving quarantine but not necessarily able to return to their normal residence. There's also other people that have not normally been within our scope; backpackers that have found themselves both without work and without accommodation and not able to move.

So we are already delivering those services, and there are lines available for people to call where they find themselves or they know people that are in dire straits. So those services exist. Like anything, we have to bring criteria to eligibility and so on, but also, sometimes might find we're not the best place to deliver those steps – there's another mechanism or another part of the system that is best placed just to support somebody. So there are hotlines, there are services being delivered. Yep.

Speaker: Helen

A couple more questions have come through, let me share them. One here seeking some guidance in terms of accommodation services. So, who can give accommodation service providers a guideline on how to safely take new clients in when others have been self-isolating? The need is there and we have demand for accommodation, but we need to balance this with safety and capacity to support.



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Speaker: Jennifer

I'll start with answering that one. So, that's been a really big issue that we've had to get, obviously, the basic public health advice was really important to overlay and provide. I guess, guidelines and steps for residential services, whether they be mental health, alcohol and drug or across the rest of the community services sector...

Speaker: Michelle

Standout group homes.

Speaker: Jennifer

Yep, all of those, so we actually made some really good progress this week and we're hoping to have a draft flowchart-type scenario out to the sector for some initial feedback, yeah, probably towards the end of the week, which will give some great guidance. But it also provides some of the right contacts you actually need to have, so that's been a big piece of work in development and hasn't been easy, but we absolutely wanted to do this and if it's needed enough and if I can get through to get clarity, yeah.

Speaker: Helen

Another question here. Have any business cases that have been developed by the taskforces been put to Treasury for additional resources by Department of Communities or Mental Health Commission?

Speaker: Michelle

The short answer's yes. So, they're in process. Yep. I was reviewing probably around, I'm guessing, around eight of them last night, so yes.

Speaker: Jennifer

And, the same for the Commission.

Speaker: Helen

Okay, but how will SWEC facilitate a more rapid response to providing housing and accommodation?



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Speaker: Michelle

How will we facilitate that? So, can I suggest that there's already an example to draw on? So, last week, we were the noted, Department of Communities was, so this is really what SWEC is set up to do... Department of Communities became aware of a group of mostly Aboriginal people who had been housed in a hotel by a not-for-profit organisation for a number of days, but the funding had run out, I understand, and they were going to be back out on the street – homeless.

We got notice of that on the Thursday and then, very rapidly, had secured availability and access to the Woodman Point Recreation Camp. And had struck agreements around the various support services that were going to be needed to support those people, both moving in with the right assessments and then support and security built around that, in a very rapid 24-hour period. So that's SWEC in operation, if I can put it that way.

Speaker: Jennifer

Just like to add to that as well. In one of our taskforce meetings this morning, there was an update around the work that we're doing with Department of Communities around the alternative accommodation, and there was conversation around that and I know there's progress on how we'll make that sort of, you know – is it a 1800 number or whatever it is, that there will be a central point. So we've got a process to understand, you know, what are the right types of accommodation and supports that people will need and so there'll be... I know they'll work for it, the taskforces are working on a very centralised model that can at least assist in doing that, so going forward.

Speaker: Helen

So, there's a follow-up, there's a related question, I think, that you may want to add some further information to: Is there a plan for management of short-term accommodation options for people either isolating, recovering, hospital discharges, etc, i.e., vacancy management 'in and out' for appropriate accommodation types?

Speaker: Jennifer

So, again, I'm at the same taskforce this morning, you know, that's what we've been working on. So there's a facility, I won't mention it at the moment, but it looks like it could be a very appropriate facility with a lot of outdoor space, security, all the facilities that are needed. And, I guess, that's the sort of thing that we're looking at, that could be for when



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someone has to isolate for a two-week period, it would be all the appropriate supports around. So, yeah, that's all being looked at in terms of that.

Speaker: Deborah

And, I think that's been part of the, I'm not part of the taskforce, but my understanding is that some groups are beginning to look at some of the properties that are on that X on the...

Speaker: Jennifer

Yes, absolutely.

Speaker: Deborah

... the accommodation list that was sent out as from Finance and the EOI (expression of interest) process as well. I suspect with the sector as well, it's also an issue of time they've got to tweak the rate at which we can, and I understand, in the sector that's also a tension for them as it is for the Department as well.

Speaker: Michelle

Yeah. Some of the other mechanisms for improving that is that we're looking to build better information sharing with Health, so whether it's WA Country Health Service or Aboriginal Medical Services, Department of Health and being able to do better forward planning around release of patients. And again, around both accommodation services, transport and so on. So that we're getting some better communication established. All of these things will live on past COVID-19, I think, actually, that it's going to make us some...

Speaker: Deborah

And, I do know that at our meeting we had with the LGA (Local Government Authority) – and I'll be curious if there's any regional people responding – was the issue of community resource centres closing down and the accommodation, kind of linked support accommodation issues in regional areas. So, I don't know, as people are listening, I'd be really interested to hear any questions or comments around what's happening in the regional areas. Because I certainly am speaking more so from a Perth metro area.



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Speaker: Helen

Couple more questions? I think we've still got some time.

Speaker: Michelle

Yeah.

Speaker: Helen

Hang on. I've just pressed the wrong button [laughs].

Thank you.

So, this is a question that goes to wellbeing. We've seen a massive outbreak of racism with posters across the freeway, as well as racist graffiti in a number of places. We have been asking the Minister to issue a statement condemning this, as Daniel Andrews has done in Victoria. So far, we have been asking for this since the last week in March. We need to see this urgently. There are people out there feeling very vulnerable and under attack.

Speaker: Michelle

Speaks to our values. Our values as a community. And, for me, I sit at this table as a leader in the community, as a leader of the Department of Communities and I can tell you, and I hope where I started you can see the way in which I'm approaching one area of racism within our Department, and that is – not only is it unacceptable, but there's a determination on my part that we go on the journey about what it takes to change that. And the pushing; simply pushing something underground is not the solution.

And so, for all of us that are leaders in whatever form, whatever role; whether we go home in the afternoon and we're speaking with our neighbours, when we're engaging at a local community level or when we come to our day jobs, all of us have responsibilities to call things out, and constructively take something forward to help the organisation or the community or the State be better.

So I take that responsibility very seriously. I expect all of you do as well. And I would invite you to continue to both call out and to take steps to build a better State in regard to that – that racism is unacceptable. Always is, always will be, and certainly is in this moment.

Jen? Deb? Did you want to say...



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Speaker: Deborah

Couldn't say it any better than that.

Speaker: Jennifer

I totally agree.

Speaker: Helen

Got a question, then, around family and domestic violence (FDV): Is there any additional assistance for women and their children seeking accommodation after leaving a family in domestic violence environment? FDV has considerably worsened in recent weeks.

Speaker: Deborah

So obviously, the first place are the refuges. And then, obviously, if there are no bed availabilities in any of the existing services – and I don't know if this is particularly true in regional, more so than metro – then obviously, the Department has a responsibility and will act to look at accommodating people if they are actually, if they're escaping violence and there's nowhere for them to go.

Speaker: Michelle

This is absolutely one of the priority areas for us. We can see what's happening in other jurisdictions. We're already getting indications around what is happening in our own State. And so, steps are being taken to improve the support for those women, for those children, for those families.

I was, just yesterday, sharing as both a tool and some disturbing data. So this is a toolkit, if you like, to help give financial abilities and empowerment to those families looking to leave an abusive situation.

A toolkit that has been developed by a group of extraordinary volunteers. Information available on our website and elsewhere. That toolkit has only had its website up and running for maybe just over 12 months. It had about 8,000 hits in its first 12 months. In the last three weeks the hits have gone up to, like, about 17,000. What does that tell us about what is going on?

So some very disturbing data just sitting in that, but also to know that that tool is there. And I sent information to the Head of Education about it and the Head of Health yesterday, asking my Communications team to work with their Communications team to get the



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visibility around that out to the very frontline workers we know that are going to be dealing with some of these people. And, it can be GPs, it can be teachers, it can be health support workers. And so, there's actually... So, there are supports out there that we really just need to make sure they're known, they're understood and that they're available in a timely way, so it's building on a lot of the stuff that we've already got, I think, it's one of the critical, immediate responses that we can move very fast on.

Speaker: Helen

So, two questions, I think in the last couple of minutes. The first one is very, I think will be a straightforward one. Can the slides be shared, please?

Speaker: Michelle

Yes.

Speaker: Helen

And, the second question goes to sustainability. So, what safeguards will be implemented to ensure that the known and overdue anticipated benefits made for vulnerable populations will be sustained into the future in the post-COVID world, once the State Emergency Welfare Plan is no longer required?

Speaker: Michele

Did either... I've spoken too much. Did either of you want to respond to that?

Speaker: Deborah

Well, I mean, I don't know that I actually have the capacity to respond to that outside of my view would be that if we are implementing things that are effectively solving the issue for vulnerable cohorts in COVID-19, they would hopefully be linked to longer-term strategies. If I look in at the Homelessness Strategy that I linked to the longer-term solution of ending homelessness. So, I would be hoping that the answer to that question is yes.

Speaker: Jennifer

And, look, I'd say the same thing. And I guess that there will be processes within Government that, in terms of the social recovery plan, you know, that's what we would be wanting and hoping for. So, with that work, we'll continue.



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Speaker: Michelle

And I think we can expect some significant decisions coming out of Government over the next week or so around that recovery piece, in terms of the commitment and resourcing and capabilities that are being built across Government and this would be very much led out of the central agencies – to drive that social and economic recovery piece. They're already reaching out to us, looking for us to be part of that process. So, firstly, that is an absolute priority for the Government broadly, and we'll be contributing, participating in that, bringing your voice to that process.

Secondly, for me, around that sustainability question. In terms of way of working, for me, I'm only really interested in jobs which are about reform and responsibilities. I take on jobs that always have that nature to them. Stepping into this job last year, what was attractive about it was the reform opportunities in there that sat in this role and, boy, I've had them in spades. You know, that's fantastic, I'm treating COVID-19 as part of that opportunity as well.

As much as it's got, the underlay is fear and uncertainty for all of us in much of this. I also am going into it every single day, seeing it as an opportunity to reform the way we work to get better outcomes. And all of us know, that doesn't just mean throwing more dollars at things. This is actually about changing the way we work and that when we get to the other side of COVID-19, it's not a snapping back moment. That, in fact, we are starting to embed different and better ways of working. So that, for me, that's part of the sustainability piece that as, again, in a leadership role, I take very seriously. I'm very determined about it and I will be seizing every opportunity every day to drive that longer-term sustainability question that you asked about.

Are we done? Yeah.

Our hour's up and I want to thank all of you, who have given us an hour of your time, listening to us, putting questions to us.

I repeat the commitment that in our frequently asked questions, we'll go through any questions we haven't answered today. We'll be sharing the slides. And, we'll be back again next Tuesday. So please join us next Tuesday at 12, we look forward to seeing you then.

We're going to leave the meeting actually open for the next 15 minutes, because we really want your feedback on this as a forum, on this as a process for you. And the best way – we're not doing a separate feedback process – we've decided the best way, today, to get the feedback from you was to leave the meeting operating for another 15 minutes. So just type it in in the question format that we've just been operating in. And we'll be capturing that feedback as well, and reshaping this forum to work for you so that it's useful. So, thank you. Thank you for that, as well.



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So, thanks, everyone. Travel safe, be safe, stay well, and all the extra meaning that comes with that in this context. And my thanks to everyone that helped make it happen. Thank you.

Speaker: Deborah

Thank you.

Speaker: Jennifer

Thank you.