



Interactive webinar series: Q&A

Overview

As part of the ongoing COVID-19 response, the Department of Communities (the Department) is hosting a weekly interactive webinar series to provide key updates and answer any questions people may have. This document provides an overview of the unanswered questions and comments from the webinar session on the 21 April 2020. The questions have been organised into themes.

Questions

Participants noted a lack of clarity around governance and decision-making between the community sector and the Department.

- The sector still doesn't know who to talk to in the Department of Communities to resolve issues and the decision-making process is still extremely unclear.
- Can you please share the Governance Slide ASAP? Are there any details of the responsibilities for each of those groups/committees?
- What about the responsibility part of that question?

Response

The Department acknowledges that the governance and decision-making processes have been rapidly changing within the COVID-19 context which has created confusion and at times delays. We have all been adjusting to the rapidly changing environment. The Community Sector Partnerships Team is developing the necessary suite of documents that clearly represents the decision-making process,

The 'new ways of working' chart that the Director General shared at the webinar has been published on the [Tuesdays at Twelve page](#) on the Department's website.

Participants would like clarity on how the changes outlined by the Director General at the webinar will translate into action for those providing front-line services.

- How does this change lead to action and change at the coalface?
- There is rightly a focus on accommodation and refugees. However, as a community DFV service provider (funded by Communities), but not an accommodation or refuge



service, we have had a 200%+ increase in referrals and contacts in the last two weeks. What support is being considered for Community DFV Services?

- It might be evolving for you – but not for people at the coalface... How do you consider multiple perspectives? *(possibly relates to the slides and response saying it is evolving)*
- I work in regional WA providing support to people with disability, many with mental health. I have noticed an increase in mental health for people generally not on a program. What is the Government doing to help and support people who have lost their jobs that are suffering anxiety and depression? I work for Forrest Personnel in Albany WA. What can be done to get people directed to providers like Forrest Personnel? Would like to be added to contact list and to receive task list co-chairs.

Response

Changes have been happening each day at the coalface. Staff from the Department and the Community Services sector have been adapting their service delivery and working together to meet the needs of vulnerable people. This will continue. Our goal through the Taskforces is to use our collective capability and experiences to understand the rapidly changing environment and the impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups both now and the emerging groups through the pandemic. Together we will develop innovative ways to take action.

We will continue to work together to capture the data outlined on increased or reduced demand across services through the task forces.

Participants would like better visibility over the activities happening across all taskforce's and a coordination mechanism established between them in order to better measure and track progress.

- Looking specifically at the work of the homelessness taskforce, will there be a reporting back to the sector and the (former) broader taskforce group about the status of the detailed proposals that had been formulated by the group? Also, the status of the working groups of the taskforce which have been suspended?
- How will Nous measure success in this piece of work with the taskforces?
- It would be helpful to hear what has been delivered from six weeks' intensive work
- I would like to hear the priorities of each taskforce – as they change from week to week perhaps!
- Thanks for that but I still have no sense of what the taskforces have been doing and what they are focused on going forward.



- In a future session, it would be good to have a 5-minute overview from each taskforce chair as to their areas of focus. This would enable us to "meet" each one and also might help breakdown the silos.
- How do systemic issues across all the taskforces get aggregated into action?

Response

The Department acknowledges that the strategic coordination of the task force has not been as sharp as it needs to be. The Community Sector Partnership Team has partnered with Emma White and her team from Nous Group to rapidly reset and strengthen this strategic coordination. They have started developing potential solutions and testing these with task force chairs including better communication channels, ways of monitoring activities and cross task force collaboration and coordination.

While responses to proposals early in the life of the taskforces will be provided it is also important to note the changing nature of the course of the pandemic and that proposals from four to five weeks ago were based on a very different trajectory for the pandemic than the situation we now find ourselves in.

Participants would like to understand the emergency management processes and how to navigate existing responsibilities within this framework.

- Is there a current State Welfare Emergency Plan which is in place and being deployed for the pandemic?
- Much of Communities involvement in the State Government pandemic response so far has been through the SHICC. Health seem still to be the best source of intelligence concerning CoVID-19 in WA. Are we concentrating on the hot spots identified by the Department of Health in the first instance and utilising that intelligence to guide/support our operational capacity? Are the economic impacts of CoVID-19 the longer-term intelligence focus?
- How do we go about negotiating contract extensions from Mental Health Commission and Department of Communities to cover off increased costs of ERO and understanding massive impact of COVID?

Response

When the State Welfare Management Plan is enacted business as usual ways of working are suspended in lots of important ways to enable the immediate response. In a pandemic scale response, even more so.

We have invited Executive Director Strategy, Policy and Planning Judith Stewart and Assistant Director General Dr James Williamson from the Western Australian Department



of Health to our next webinar to provide an overview and update on the emergency management response, which includes social and economic impacts.

There were concerns that the Department have not sufficiently prioritised the response effort (to vulnerable cohorts) and a frustration that feedback loops on requests or queries to mobilise response efforts are not clear and too slow.

- Six weeks into a pandemic and we are still working on terms of reference.....where is the sense of urgency by the Department?
- Other states have moved quickly and swiftly – why not fortress Dept of Communities - what's been the blockage – capacity, capability, political will?
- Last week Michelle said 8 Business cases went to ERC. What info can you provide on their progress

Response

The Department is treating this as a priority and is working in partnership with the Community Services Sector. We will continue to manage our response and ensure it is aligned the changing nature of the course of the pandemic.

Participants want to safeguard against a siloed approach to taskforces and that the needs of diverse groups are represented and included.

- In considering 'the behaviours we want to individually and collectively commit to as we work together in the taskforces', I would recommend inclusivity over siloing cohorts that are perceived as 'niche'. *(May be in relation to response to question 'Are task forces making any or special efforts to ensure representation of special needs groups such as culturally and linguistically diverse communities or LGBTQI')*
- How can we ensure that those peaks who are involved across the various categories, such as Linkwest, Volunteers WA, Ethnic Communities Council of WA, are involved as they have a broader overview of the impacts on their sectors/communities?
- What strategies are in place to ensure a diversity of people with lived experience (consumers and families) are informing the initiatives which are being put forward and to ensure that these will be fit-for-purpose on the ground?

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Participants commented on the need to identify the secondary impacts of COVID-19 and had strong concerns about the welfare of the vulnerable population into the recovery phase and beyond.

- Are there two different aspects to recovery? For many of us it is about how we get back to work under the 'new normal' and find ways of doing things differently. But there will be some who don't recover – we know there will be secondary impacts from the economic downturn with people finding themselves unemployed and in hardship for the first time. How are the taskforces identifying the new vulnerable cohort? Who are they, how do we engage and support them... given many will be contacting services for the first time?
- How will the taskforces deal with the financial hardship issues that will be experienced with people who don't fit into the current 'vulnerable' cohorts who have never used community services before?
- Given that we work with those at the margins and the most vulnerable – how will the taskforces make sure that the drive for economic recovery is undertaken in a way that does not further disadvantage these?

Response

The task forces have an important role in recovery planning and when we emerge from our current response phase in the delivery of that recovery. The task forces are uniquely placed to provide intelligence and advice about the impacts and needs of vulnerable cohorts.

Our thinking and planning needs to also be informed by data. I have asked my teams to start looking at what data is available within the Department to understand current demand and ways in which we can track and predict future trends. I know many of your organisations are doing this too. I encourage the task forces to share data.



Participants raised elevated concerns people affected by family and domestic violence and safety concerns for children.

- What consideration is being given to children at risk of child sexual abuse or already being victimised and now confined further by COVID-19 with their offender. Yesterday 16 people were arrested across Australia for child exploitation offences (including in WA) and it was noted there is an increase in the dark web of live streaming of child abuse and people accessing this. If children are accessing online services and schooling due to COVID-19 what is being done about cybersafety? Why isn't child sexual abuse receiving priority along with FDV?
- Has there been consideration of moving perpetrators of family and domestic violence out of their home rather than the victim and their children and placing them at further risk in relation to COVID-19 and disrupting their lives? It seems the victims of FDV are further victimised by being taken away from their home and the perpetrator not held accountable for their violence. With all the alternative accommodation options and tracking processes that have been introduced as a result of COVID-19 it seems there is a unique opportunity at this point in time to provide alternative accommodation for perpetrators of FDV and be able to track their movements and any breaches of a VRO put in place so they can't return home.
- We have needed to move quickly on a local coordinated response to the initial and predicted spike in FDV. How can we feedback what's working to the taskforce? *(This was probably answered as part of response on emailing the taskforce chairs?)*

Response

We are currently working on this response and will update this document as soon as possible.

Participants are concerns that the voice and experience of front-line service delivery and community service organisations at the local and regional levels are relatively absent and disconnected to the work of the task forces.

- Is there a plan to involve the DLG's in the local responses?
- Emma, how will we ensure that the perspective of smaller community-based agencies be represented in the taskforces; from the information available on the homelessness taskforce they are mainly large organisations there other than peaks, and they have a different experience to the smaller orgs.
- Feels like it would demonstrate true partnership if reps from NFPs were also there.
- Does this rapid reset also provide an opportunity for the Department's service delivery frontline functions to work more closely with our sector partners at a local level?



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