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| COVID 19 Mental Health Response & Recovery |
| Non-Government Community-managed Mental Health Communique 21 May 2020 |

# Overview

This is the fourth of our regular communiques on key updates and advice across a range of areas.

**Please forward these communiques to your staff, as they contain critical advice and information.**

As of 26 May 2020, Victoria has 1,610 total confirmed cases, an increase of 5 since yesterday. Eight people are in hospital, including 3 people in intensive care; 19 people have died. 168 cases have an unknown source of infection, an increase of 2 since yesterday. 1,533 people have recovered.

We encourage you to subscribe to the Chief Health Officer updates and emergency advice from the Department of Health and Human Services here <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19-daily-update>

For your information we include links to

* [the COVID -19 Pandemic Plan for the Victorian Health Sector](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/about/publications/ResearchAndReports/covid-19-pandemic-plan-for-vic)
* [the COVID-19 Disability Services Sector Plan](https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/news/released-covid-19-plan-disability-services-sector)
* [online mental health resources](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/mental-health-resources-coronavirus-covid-19)
* [Beyond Blue Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service](https://coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au/?utm_campaign=hp_banner)

# COVID risks and impacts on Mental Health Services

The coronavirus pandemic response and recovery has sparked innovation and accelerated change, of which has been reflected largely in the National Pandemic MH Response and Recovery Plan.

The National Plan provides an opportunity to align reform opportunities with early directions from the Royal Commission into Victorian Mental Health System, and the national reform agenda. Mental Health Reform Victoria and the Mental Health and Drugs Branch would like to facilitate a process of reflection.

This will provide the opportunity for the community managed mental health sector to consider and provide advice on which changes to service delivery arrangements should be retained in the recovery phase of the pandemic response. Further information will be provided on how you can be involved in this process.

We are aware that many services are now using telehealth as a platform through which to engage clients and are interested in exploring the challenges and benefits this has provided at both the organisational and client and carer levels.

We expect that that service demand for community managed mental health services may increase during the recovery phase of the pandemic as the impact of trauma, mental ill health, unemployment and poverty accelerates. Planning for this phase of the pandemic response is commencing now.

Budget announcement

On 15 May 2020, in addition to the $59.4 million COVID MH package announced during April 2020, the Minister for Mental Health Martin Foley announced an additional $19.5 million in funding to deliver essential reform recommendations from the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System interim report and to help flatten a potential second curve of mental ill health. Additional information is in the attached media release.

National Mental Health and Wellbeing Pandemic Response Plan

National Cabinet today endorsed the National Mental Health and Wellbeing Pandemic Plan which focuses on assisting all Australians with their mental health and wellbeing. The Plan is accompanied by a $48 million package. The Plan can be found here: <https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/mental-health-and-wellbeing-pandemic-response-plan>

Easing of restrictions

The Premier of Victoria has announced a further extension to the State of Emergency, until 31 May.  The Premier also announced some easing of restrictions on activities and gatherings.

Under the new directions which came into force at 11.59pm Tuesday 12 May 2020, there are now five permitted reasons to leave home:

* Shopping for food and supplies that you need
* Care and caregiving
* Exercise and recreation
* Work and education – if you can’t do it from home, and
* Visiting friends and family.

Facilities such as community centres, public halls and public libraries can still be used as a place for delivering essential services such as food banks, services for the homeless and support services such as Alcoholics Anonymous or parent groups. If a person is attending one of your support groups a record of their name and mobile phone number should be kept. Appropriate physical distancing of at least 1.5 metres between people at all times must continue.

Additional information can be found here: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/stay-home-restrictions-coronavirus#what-about-group-based-community-support-services-like-alcoholics-anonymous>)

With regards to the number of visitors permitted in mental health facilities:

* No more than two people can visit a resident together to provide care and support.
* Each resident can have no more than one visit (of up to two visitors) each day.
* Visits must be for no more than two hours. The only exception is if visitors are supporting end-of-life care to a resident of a facility.
* Visitors must comply with all screening and infection control measures put in place by the facility.
* You should maintain a 1.5 metre (a full arm span) physical distance between you and the resident and all other people in the facility for the duration of your visit.

Additional information can be found here: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-care-facilities-directions-frequently-asked-questions#what-other-conditions-apply-to-workers-and-visitors>

Information on the delivery of face-to-face services can be found here: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/stay-home-restrictions-coronavirus#can-mental-health-face-to-face-counselling-services-resume>

Information on actions for workplaces can be found here:

<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/stay-home-restrictions-coronavirus#actions-for-organisations-workplaces-or-employer>

General information can be found here: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/gradual-easing-restrictions-covid-19>

# Youth Residential Rehabilitation services

In discussion with providers of Youth Residential Rehabilitation (YRR) the department will continue to have a policy of no visitors or overnight visitors to the site until 31 May 2020.

YRR staff can now return to face to face engagement with residents whilst maintaining physical distancing requirements. Where the design of the YRR does not allow these activities to be held inside YRR providers are encouraged to make use of outdoor spaces.

# Personal Protective Equipment

Please see the attached PPE for Community Service Providers guidance on the use of Personal Protective Equipment. This guidance details when staff may need to use PPE and what PPE should be donned for certain situations.

Community-based mental health organisations can submit requests for PPE to [COVID19PPErequest@dhhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:COVID19PPErequest@dhhs.vic.gov.au) if their existing suppliers are not able to provide the stocks they require or if PPE supplies are running critically low (less than two weeks supply for services which need to be delivered face to face).

Please see the request form attached to this email that details what information you will need to include.

The department will review your request and contact you with a response. Given current demand and supply pressures, the department may not be able to supply all requested items and may need to encourage sharing across services. Arrangements for distribution of the order to your organisation will also be communicated at this time.

Additional resources

Tandem’s ‘COVID-19 support for family and friends’ [Support for Family and Friends](https://www.tandemcarers.org.au/support-for-family-friends.php) provides links to useful information that carers may need during the pandemic.

# Victoria Together

Victoria Together <http://together.vic.gov.au/> went live on Friday 1 May 2020.

Victoria Together is a new portal sharing some of our state’s best online experiences – including music, the arts, science and nature, recipes and mental wellbeing. As we face coronavirus, Victoria Together is aimed at ensuring our community stays connected/

These include virtual tours and content from:

* online tours of some of NGV’s famous exhibitions
* activities from Museums Victoria
* live animal-spotting from Zoos Victoria
* online cinema from ACMI
* live streamed performances from the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and the Geelong Arts Centre
* comedy, music and games
* exercise, meditation and mental wellbeing support
* dedicated resources for kids.

Please accept our ongoing thanks for your immense work at this most uncertain and challenging of times.

In the interim, if you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact either Julie Skilbeck ([Julie.skilbeck@dhhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:Julie.skilbeck@dhhs.vic.gov.au)) or Jessica Schirmer ([Jessica.schirmer@dhhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:Jessica.schirmer@dhhs.vic.gov.au)).

**Pam Anders Matthew Hercus**

CEO, Mental Health Reform Victoria Director, Mental Health and Drugs Branch