



Liz Hefren-Webb
Deputy Secretary
Department of Social Services

31 March 2020

Dear Ms Hefren-Webb

Additional FWC Funding

We welcomed the announcement on Sunday of an additional \$200 million for the Financial Wellbeing and Capability programs and are grateful for the very positive moves the government is making to ease financial hardship for all Australians during these unprecedented times. While we imagine that the department is still working through the detail of the additional funding, we hope that all existing providers are considered in the allocation of funds, rather than rolling additional funds out to just a few larger providers.

CISVic agencies are essential services, helping local people

Community Information and support services are local and trusted centres, which are deeply embedded in local communities. Our size and independence has meant that we have been able to seamlessly transition almost overnight from face-to-face to phone-based service delivery. Most of our local sites have now been operating remotely for three weeks - ensuring continuity of services to vulnerable people while protecting both workforce and clients.

We receive core funding from local councils which supports the operations of our services, and most centres are currently actively involved in the municipality's disaster management planning. Additionally, state government has deemed our sector as an *essential service* ensuring we are able to remain operational should the lock-down escalate in Victoria.

The CISVic membership comprises both consortia and individually funded centres. The CISVic consortia is made up of 26 independent organisations delivering services from 32 sites. Individually funded agencies include Community Support Frankston and Casey North Community Information & Support Services group. Collectively, we deliver close to \$3 million of DSS funded ER annually.

CISVic members are delivering services now. They are already experiencing growth in demand and budgets are under pressure. Numbers of new clients are surging. By way of example, 100 per cent of clients at our Glen Huntly site on 27 March 2020 were new to both the centre, and to the welfare system, having recently incurred COVID-19 related job losses.

Flexible funding arrangements remain vital

We know, from our weekly conversations with other key providers in Victoria that the whole ER sector is vulnerable in this climate due to our aged volunteer workforce. As you are aware, the ER sector relies heavily on volunteers to deliver service. With the vast majority of volunteers over 65 years old, we are now struggling to backfill their roles. Where possible, we are redeploying paid staff from other programs, but we certainly feel, that once more of the newly unemployed Australians seek out our services, we will struggle with staffing. We hope that the increased funding will give us provision to increase the hours of existing workers or to employ

Community Information & Support Victoria



new staff. Some local centres already have the IT for services to be delivered from worker's homes (laptops and phones), and others do not. We anticipate that some centres will need funds to provide the appropriate technology over an extended period of lock-down.

We are an existing funded ER & FC service, and are keen to know how quickly this new money will flow and whether the flexible funding model still applies. Our sector is particularly vulnerable now due to its high reliance on aging volunteers who have now been advised to stay at home.

CISVic agencies have been nimble and resourceful in these challenging times. Our sector has demonstrated its capacity to offer flexible, responsive services, with a strong commitment to meeting the needs of those in financial hardship.

Please feel free to contact me via return email or mobile (0407 670 125) should you wish to discuss this.

I hope that you and your team remain safe and well.

Kind regards

Kate Wheller

Executive Officer