



The Hon Scott Morrison, MP
Prime Minister of Australia
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

20 March 2020

Dear Prime Minister

We are writing to seek your urgent help as we face the impacts of COVID-19.

We are the peak body representing local community information and support services in Victoria. Our local centres (62 sites) deliver information, referral, advocacy and support services including emergency relief to half a million Victorians every year. Our emergency relief program is funded by Federal Government. We receive \$2million annually from Department of Social Services. Several our sites also deliver federally funded Financial Counselling programs.

Our workforce comprises around 420 paid staff and close to 5000 volunteers. Our dedicated, passionate volunteers are trained to assess and deliver services to people with complex needs.

We, like other Emergency Relief agencies, rely heavily on volunteers to deliver this critical support service. The vast majority of our volunteers are aged 65+. Some of our local centres are staffed only by volunteers, while others have between 1-50 paid staff.

We are working at the coalface every day, supporting people who are experiencing personal and financial hardship. While we welcome the \$750 one off Economic Support Payment, without a \$95 weekly increase to Newstart, people will continue to struggle to meet the most basic daily living costs.

The impact of COVID-19 is having an immediate effect on demand for our services, with the number of new clients increasing. In one centre I spoke to today, 30% of clients were new and their need COVID-19 related (job loss or reduced casual hours).

We are daily modifying our delivery model to ensure continuity of service and workforce well-being. The reality is that with the growing risk of COVID-19 infection, our higher-risk aged workforce is shrinking.

We are calling on Federal Government to immediately increase Emergency Relief funding to all existing partners.

Community Information & Support Victoria

We have the infrastructure and workforce to deliver this vital support to the community. With additional funding, we could effectively respond to growing demand, and potentially, deliver more substantial packages to individuals and families. Increased funding will also enable us to backfill the workforce with new and redeployed paid staff as volunteer numbers drop off.

In addition to our call for an immediate increase to Emergency Relief funding, we endorse the ACOSS & ASU COVID-19 Community Sector Rescue Pack recommendations asking the Federal Government to:

- Extend all business-related stimulus measures to community sector and not for profit organisations.
- Create a Community Sector continuity of service enabling Fund to ensure continuity of service delivery, secure jobs, prevent loss of jobs or income, guaranteed paid special leave for all workers, and to enable ramp up of services for people in need as well ensure that services remain viable to assist with the recovery from the pandemic.
- Urgently respond to the specific asks of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations.
- Urgently provide program level funding to community services that rely on individual funding arrangements to stabilise workforce and allow for adaptation e.g. childcare, employment and other services, out of home care, NDIS.
- Commit to restore funding for the Equal Remuneration Order implementation.
- Provide additional funding to housing and homelessness services, accommodation and residential services to purchase suitable safe housing for people who are living in rooming houses or accommodation, residential or group home services in overcrowded housing, or who are sleeping rough.
- Guarantee access to Personal Protected Equipment and other essential supplies including Food Supplies to ensure basic needs are met.
- Create maximum flexibility on contract requirements for government-funded organisations to enable responsiveness to changing community needs and crisis, for example:
 - Delay or relax reporting obligations;
 - Freeze government reform and new tendering processes;
 - Suspend KPIs and outcomes to allow for adaption to new conditions;
 - Remove penalties for non-compliance with contracts arising from COVID-19 Emergency.
 - Allow flexibility in how funds are used to support our community safely during covid-19



I can be contacted by phone or email (0407 670 125, kate@cisvic.org.au) should you wish to discuss this request further.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kate Wheller".

Kate Wheller

Executive Officer