



Communities
& Justice

COVID-19 – Frequently asked questions

Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) Webinar

31 March 2020

Source: Questions have been developed based on enquiries received before and after the SHS Webinar on Tuesday 31 March from DCJ Service Providers.

The following presenters were a part of this webinar:

- Minister Gareth Ward – Minister for Communities & Justice & Disability
- Anne Campbell – Executive Director, Housing & Homelessness
- Brendan Clifford – St Vincent Health Australia
- Jay Rebbeck – Rebbeck Consulting
- Questions were received into DCJ via the Specialist Homelessness Services mailbox SHSProgram@fac.s.nsw.gov.au.

Information already published on DCJ websites is shown at the end of this document as a reference

CONTENTS

STAFFING	3
HOUSING, INCOME & YOUNG PEOPLE	3
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & FAMILIES	5
PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT AND CLEANING PRODUCTS	5
TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION	6
TENANTS AND TENANCIES	9
EXITING CUSTODIAL FACILITIES	11
BOARDING HOUSES	11
EQUAL ACCESS	11
CORONAVIRUS TESTING	12
NON-COMPLIANCE WITH HEALTH ADVICE	12
COMMUNICATION TO RURAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES	12
CONTRACTS & FUNDING	13
ABORIGINAL SERVICES	13
CLIENT RIGHTS	15
ESSENTIAL SERVICE DELIVERY	16
ROUGH SLEEPING	16
Published Content	17
People sleeping rough and COVID-19 – DCJ and homelessness sector response	17
Important information about COVID-19 for SHS providers	18
Service Providers	20
Housing and homelessness	30
Housing Services	30
Homelessness services	31

STAFFING

Question:

Will there be special leave for staff of homelessness services, including refuges, who may be infected or unable to work because of COVID-19? Will this be available to both permanent and casual employees? Will services receive funding to cover this leave?

Answer:

It is important that there are no job losses and service provider staff have financial security during this unprecedented time. DCJ will continue to pay providers who may not necessarily be able to meet the contract conditions. Service providers are asked to keep talking to their contract manager so we understand what is happening for NGOs.

Question:

Services are already needing additional staff because of increased demand or to backfill staff absence due to COVID-19. How is NSW Government assisting services across the entire social service system to redeploy or recruit suitable staff?

Answer:

Service providers are asked to speak with their contract manager so we are able to understand what is happening to your service as a result of COVID-19 and the staffing needs for your organisation.

Question:

If we do go into further restrictions, how does a 24/7 refuge worker prove that they are out in the community for legitimate purposes, e.g. going to work?

Answer:

Should this be required, DCJ will provide a template letter for providers to use, to advise that the staff member is working in essential services.

HOUSING, INCOME & YOUNG PEOPLE

Question:

What arrangements are being made to accommodate young people, under 16 and 18 years of age? These young people, typically, would enter the child protection system. What additional resources are being provided to the OOHC sector to meet increased need for accommodation and case management?

Answer:

A policy is being developed to support providers to increase their accommodation capacity through establishing alternative accommodation (AA). This policy will provide guidance as to when, under what conditions and how unaccompanied children and young people aged 12 to 15 years of age may be provided with alternative accommodation (AA). Under this policy it will be the responsibility of service providers to ensure adequate 24/7 on-site supervision and support for clients temporarily residing in AA.

Some initial information on youth homelessness, alternate accommodation and COVID-19 matters is available in the [COVID-19 – Frequently Asked Questions for HYAP and Youth SHS Providers resource](#) that has been developed based on questions from the sector. This resource was distributed by email to providers on 21 April 2020.

Question:

What are the alternative accommodation options for young people once refuges are full or unable to safely house new people? What are the arrangements for young people under 18 years, and young people over 18?

Answer:

Information on youth homelessness, alternative accommodation and COVID-19 matters is available in the [COVID-19 – Frequently Asked Questions for HYAP and Youth SHS Providers resource](#) that has been developed based on questions from the sector. This resource was distributed by email to providers on 21 April 2020.

Question:

Crisis services currently have a 3 month limit before moving a young person onto further accommodation. Will this be temporarily adjusted to minimise the young people moving through different services?

Answer:

Young people should not be exited from crisis services if they are unable to be reconciled safely with family or if no suitable alternative medium or long-term accommodation can be identified.

Question:

Where can I find the FAQ document for service responses for young people under 18 and the Alternative Accommodation policy for under 16s?

Answer:

In addition to the Homelessness Guidelines that have been developed, DCJ has developed a FAQ document to respond to specific questions raised by the NSW Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) and Homeless Youth Assistance Program (HYAP) sector delivering accommodation assistance to children and young people during the COVID-19 crisis.

The [COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions for HYAP and Youth SHS Providers resource](#) was distributed by email to providers on 21 April 2020 and is available to download.

A policy is in developed on Alternate Accommodation for youth in response to COVID-19 and will be made available to providers once finalised.

We will continue to update the sector on developments, which you can also access on the DCJ website [HERE](#).

Question:

Has the Federal Government indicated whether there will be any changes in eligibility criteria for pensions and benefits, enabling young people under 16 to access payments such as the special benefits payment? Is this something the NSW State Government is talking to the Federal Government about?

Answer:

This is a matter for consideration by the Australian Government.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & FAMILIES

Question:

It is likely during the Pandemic that women who have escaped domestic violence will have no one safe to step in and mind their children if they become ill. One of the greatest fears for domestic violence survivors can be having their children removed. Taking this sensitivity into account, has the Department put any additional resources in place to support survivors of domestic violence who cannot care for their children during their illness?

Answer:

The NSW Government/ DCJ is open to working in partnership with the DFV sector to identify options that provide additional supports to strengthen the capacity of families to support their children if impacted by COVID-19.

Question:

Following from the Federal Government's announcement of additional funding for tele-mental health and DFV services, how will NSW coordinate this funding, and how will they connect these new services with caseworkers to coordinate care.

Answer:

The NSW Government is working closely with the Australian Government regarding the additional funding being made available for DFV services. Further detail about the new funding will be released as soon as possible. The NSW Government will work closely with DFV services to ensure coordination of funding.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT AND CLEANING PRODUCTS

Question:

Access to personal protective equipment (PPE) and sanitisation products is a major concern across the sector. Is the department planning to source protective clothing, masks, EPA disinfectant and hand sanitisers for SHS services? If not, where can services access this equipment?

Answer:

DCJ is procuring PPE for SHS providers. In the first instance this will be distributed to priority cohorts including services who work with rough sleepers and larger accommodation settings/crisis accommodation. As there is a shortage of PPE generally, distribution will occur as soon as possible.

Question:

What personal protective gear should be worn by crisis accommodation staff when they are working in a house with a resident who has been diagnosed with COVID-19? Under what circumstances should PPE be worn and where can it be sourced?

Answer:

NSW Health has advised people who are in self-isolation to wear a mask when needing to be in contact with others, while avoiding unnecessary use of masks.

Staff should avoid contact with people suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 and follow social distancing rules set by NSW Health. Further information is available on the NSW Health website.

Further details on PPE from DCJ will be included in the next revision of the Department's [Guidelines for Homelessness Accommodation during COVID-19](#).

Question:

What are the recommended cleaning and sanitisation products that service should be using to minimise risk and potential spread of COVID-19? Is there a list of these products available?

Answer:

The [Guidelines for Homelessness Accommodation during COVID-19](#) include detailed instructions on cleaning procedures developed by NSW Health.

Question:

What is the NSW Government doing to ensure supply of food and essential goods to remote communities, where often supply of goods was already an issue prior to this pandemic?

Answer:

Where food shortages due to supply chain issues exist, services should contact their DCJ Contract Manager or can email SHSProgram@facns.nsw.gov.au to advise of supply chain issues in specific locations.

We are working with our Food Program NGO partners and communications have been sent to providers on a range of Food Relief initiatives that are in place.

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

Question:

Can you please confirm the additional funding for Temporary Accommodation (TA) including:

- Where new TA has been identified
- How DCJ is working to identify and coordinate additional TA

- **How services should work with DCJ to identify new TA**

Answer:

The NSW Government has allocated \$34.34m in funding to June 2021 to support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, including \$14.32m for Temporary Accommodation and \$20.02m for rental subsidies to enable people to access or sustain private rental accommodation during this challenging time.

DCJ is currently developing the approach to rolling out the additional TA funding. Ensuring funding is allocated quickly to areas that need it most will underpin the approach.

Question:

How long will people be able to remain in TA for this period? Does the annual limit of 28 days per individual still apply? What are the exit options for TA?

Answer:

Due to expected increased demand for emergency accommodation, variations to emergency Temporary Accommodation (TA) timeframes have been made to support public health measures to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. These are shown in the table below.

An initial 5 nights of temporary accommodation is currently available to anyone who meets standard eligibility requirements for TA. For rough sleepers only, one month (30 days) of TA is available regardless of how many nights of TA they have already received.

5 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of nights given to anyone eligible for TA (note that if someone has been tested for COVID-19 but they do not have results back then they are entitled to 5 days). • Every effort should be made to transition clients out of TA and into sustainable accommodation as quickly as possible. However, consideration will be given to clients who are unable to meet the requirement of seeking alternative accommodation to resolve their own housing need because of the impact of COVID-19. • <u>Extensions will be provided as needed on a case by case basis taking into account the client's circumstances.</u> • Every effort to should also be made to ensure that clients are linked into appropriate support as quickly as possible.
Initial 5 days to assess needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For women and children escaping domestic and family violence (DFV) an initial 5 days will be provided. • <u>Extensions will be provided as needed on a case by case basis taking into account the client's circumstances.</u> • Women and children escaping DFV should be quickly linked in with appropriate support providers and risk assessments should be undertaken to ensure the accommodation is safe and appropriate. Clients should be moved (either within their initial TA or via an extension of TA) as needed.
14 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of nights for people advised by NSW Health to self-isolate. • Please note that clients seeking housing assistance that identify as having a positive COVID-19 diagnosis are to be referred to NSW Health for accommodation. To do this,

clients need to call Health Direct on 1800 022 222.

- | | |
|---------|--|
| 30 days | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clients who identify as, or are referred by a provider as a rough sleeper will be told they qualify for 30 days assistance• DCJ will book an initial 5 nights for people who are sleeping rough so that an assessment can take place on where best to accommodate them for the duration of the assistance.• This will allow time for DCJ housing and/or NGO supported TA provider time to assess the clients circumstances and either extend in the same accommodation or relocate to more appropriate accommodation, for example supported TA for the duration of the assistance.• This applies state-wide including the pre-booked metro service. |
|---------|--|

An additional 300 rooms have been prepaid up until end June and an extension of TA can be provided if needed, taking into account individual circumstances, and noting that clients need to be linked into support where possible with a view to transitioning to longer term accommodation.

Clients do not need to present to an office to apply for housing assistance or for an extension to TA assistance. They can do this over the phone. Those who do attend an office in person will be provided with a flyer with the phone number for Link2Home. Link2Home who will do the initial assessment for TA. Extensions of TA will be managed by the relevant housing office.

There are a range of possible exit options for clients in TA including social housing and support to live in the private market, depending on client circumstances and locational factors. Work is also underway to look at exit pathways from TA through the Inner City Taskforce. Whilst this work is focused on the Inner City, the exit options being developed will be applicability and adaptability to other local contexts.

Question:

How will NSW funding for homelessness services be distributed to ensure that TA is available and supported by caseworkers

Answer:

DCJ is currently developing an approach to rolling out the new funding in a streamlined way and will communicate this once approved. Ensuring subsidies are available to people in areas that need them in a timely manner will underpin the implementation approach

District-level arrangements are being put in place to link people in TA with appropriate supports.

DCJ is looking at how certain services could be temporarily repurposed to support people in TA, where that is required.

Question:

What is the plan for supporting people who are sleeping rough and couch surfing into TA?

Answer:

The NSW Government has committed an additional \$14.32 million in funding for additional temporary accommodation and DCJ has lifted the 28 day cap on time spent in temporary accommodation. Clients that are homeless will be placed in temporary accommodation for 1 month, regardless of how many nights they have already received. Clients do not need to present to an office for an extension – they can do this over the phone with their local office.

DCJ is currently contacting all temporary accommodation providers to determine their ability to provide accommodation for people in self-isolation or quarantine and to provide food. DCJ is also following up a number of offers from accommodation providers to provide additional temporary accommodation.

TENANTS AND TENANCIES

Question:

Following from the announcement of an additional \$20 million for Rent Choice, how are homelessness services to connect potential tenants with real estate agents during different stages of lock-down? Is DCJ looking at a systemic approach to this?

Answer:

DCJ is currently developing an approach to rolling out the new funding in a streamlined way and will communicate this once approved. Ensuring subsidies are available to people in areas that need them in a timely manner will underpin the implementation approach.

Real estate agents are finding ways of operating virtually (online viewings etc.), despite the restrictions on movement.

DCJ is also working closely with the homelessness peaks on strategies to link suitable SHS clients with these products.

Question:

Are there government guidelines for community housing providers and tenants who fall into rental arrears? Is that waived or set up as a payback after COVID-19.

Answer:

DCJ will not evict public housing tenants for COVID-19 related rental arrears due to financial stress, if they agree to a modest repayment plan and go onto the Rental Deduction Scheme (RDS). For the duration of the pandemic, the maximum amount of rent arrears to be included in a repayment plan is 2% of income.

Where DCJ has already terminated a tenancy, but the tenant has not left the property, DCJ will re-sign the tenant to their property if they agree to the terms above.

If a public housing tenant on a current RDS arrangement is experiencing financial hardship due to COVID-19, DCJ will revise their payment to be no more than 2% of income for the duration of the pandemic.

DCJ will not proceed with the next rent increase for those public housing tenants whose statutory income was scheduled to increase by CPI.

Public housing tenants who lose their jobs and are going onto Centrelink payments will be put onto a \$5 a week rent until their Centrelink payment commences.

The additional Centrelink incomes and special payments related to COVID-19 will not be assessed in the calculation of:

- rents for public housing tenants and subsidies for recipients of rental assistance products (Rent Choice and Start Safely)
- eligibility for social housing on income grounds (all other criteria will apply).

Question:

What is the NSW Government doing to ensure the protection of tenants in housing during the COVID-19 pandemic? In particular, under the Act, tenants must provide access to the property for certain purposes, such as rental inspection. In this situation, tenants have no right to prevent a stranger entering their home.

Answer:

DCJ Housing has ceased all non-essential visits to tenants. Where a visit is required, Housing staff are trained on how to best protect themselves and tenants from COVID-19. DCJ will not access a property without permission unless there is an NCAT order in place or there is a requirement to access under Section 55 of the RTA. Further information is publically available at <https://coronavirus.dcj.nsw.gov.au/services/housing-and-homelessness>.

AMS Contractors are undertaking extra measures to assess risk prior to attending properties by asking questions through the Contractor's Contact Centre when a tenant calls for maintenance or appointments are being made to undertake maintenance.

If a tenant identifies that they are in isolation or are unwell, Contractors have protocols in place to undertake urgent maintenance using appropriate PPE, or to submit extensions of time for non-urgent maintenance as appropriate. Subcontractors and contractor staff are following NSW Health guidelines for managing hygiene, self-isolation if required and other appropriate protocols to ensure the safety of tenants and other staff.

Question:

Does the six-month moratorium on residential evictions apply to current tenants who have already received a termination notice but are yet to attend tribunal?

Answer:

DCJ will not evict tenants for rent arrears if they agree to a modest repayment plan. Where there are current NCAT proceedings, a Specific Performance Order will be pursued rather than termination, if the client agrees to the modest repayment. If the client does not agree then normal processes apply. The normal process will apply for breaches of a tenancy which are not due to financial hardship.

Question:

To prevent evictions in the case of job loss, can the rental subsidy be extended to affordable housing tenants of community housing providers?

Answer:

Announcement and approval of the wage subsidy (job keeper program) mitigates some of this risk. Some affordable housing tenants may be able to sustain tenancies from May 2020 when the payments start. DCJ is happy to consider any specific proposals from CHPs if this continues to be a concern.

EXITING CUSTODIAL FACILITIES

Question:

What assessment process and arrangements are being made to ensure appropriate housing for people leaving prison?

Answer:

DCJ Housing and Corrective Services NSW have been working in partnership to deliver better housing support for people leaving prison, with a focus on systemic change to foster early communications between agencies prior to an inmate's release. A pilot is underway in four prisons which allows for holistic pre-planning to be undertaken with inmates and the most suitable housing assistance provided post release.

In addition to the pilot, changes have also been recently introduced across all prisons to allow inmates to complete applications for housing support online, rather than over the phone, and up to four weeks prior to release. These changes will give people leaving more opportunity to secure appropriate housing support prior to release.

BOARDING HOUSES

Question:

What actions are being taken to ensure boarding house residents can remain healthy and well?

Answer:

DCJ has responsibility for assisted boarding houses accommodating people with additional needs. The Boarding House Team in DCJ continues its monitoring function and is in regular contact with all assisted boarding houses, including on-site visits while still observing social distancing.

All assisted boarding houses have been provided with links to the NSW Health website, and advice about infection control. Observations from DCJ officers is that all assisted boarding houses have taken the issue seriously and implemented infection prevention procedures such as cleaning regimes especially in common areas, strict handwashing, restricting non-essential visitors, and social distancing.

Assisted Boarding Houses are also being included in the planning and activity that is occurring in DCJ for SHS, e.g. deep cleaning, infectious control policy.

EQUAL ACCESS

Question:

What provisions are available to extend social service support to people who are usually ineligible for government support, but are now at risk of homelessness due to the impact of COVID-19? For example NZ citizens, asylum seekers, and international students who may have who have precarious visa or employment status.

Answer:

DCJ is currently considering options around how to develop an accommodation response for non-residents who are sleeping rough, for example for non-resident backpackers.

CORONAVIRUS TESTING

Question:

If there is a client or young person in a service or refuge with mild symptoms but no additional risk factors, is this considered a necessity to test?

Answer:

Staff or clients with mild symptoms should telephone their usual health clinic to check if they meet the current criteria for testing. If testing is recommended, services should assist staff or clients to safely organise testing.

If unable to reach the client's usual health care provider, call the local Public Health Unit or Health direct on 1800 022 222.

Ensure information about the client's recent movements / travel or contact with a known or possible case of coronavirus is on hand.

Testing arrangements for COVID-19 may change in the coming weeks, and in any case, you can find the most recent guidance [HERE](#) which outlines the current testing arrangements in NSW.

NON-COMPLIANCE WITH HEALTH ADVICE

Question:

How should I respond to non-compliance when a person has had instructions from health professionals?

Answer:

If a person with reported non-compliance has been counselled to follow health advice, they may be followed up by NSW Police if ongoing non-compliance occurs.

People may call NSW Police through 'Crimestoppers' if a person is identified by members of the public as breaching Quarantine/Isolation orders.

There are penalties under NSW Public Health Act and Australian Government Biosecurity act for non-compliance.

COMMUNICATION TO RURAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES

Question:

How is the NSW Government getting critical information to people in rural and remote areas that may not have access to internet or mobile phone?

Answer:

Feedback from district colleagues is that most clients do have access to mobile phones and can be contacted.

Service providers are encouraged to use brokerage funding to equip clients with mobile phones, credit and data, where required, in order to maintain contact with clients.

CONTRACTS & FUNDING

Question:

Is there going to be a more relaxed approach around CIMS data and reporting during this period? For example, a service that receives funding to transport young people is currently unable to work at full capacity due to the risks present so therefore they are unable to meet their funding requirements at this stage.

Answer:

DCJ has approached the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare for their advice on SHS reporting requirements and is awaiting advice. The SHS Collection (extracted via CIMS for NSW) is administered by the AIHW and NSW will be unable to make a unilateral decision on AIHW's reporting requirements and timeframes.

Question:

You've indicated delays for recommissioning of SHS services, can you please provide further detail to reassure services?

Answer:

At this time DCJ are continuing to monitor the impacts of COVID-19 and preparing the sector to adjust service delivery. The immediate focus for the sector and DCJ is on essential service delivery. DCJ will provide advice in due course to the sector about the recommissioning timeframes and the related processes.

Question:

If SHS services repurpose their Transitional Housing properties to allow for room to isolate clients who become ill, will they have to still pay the market rent on the properties during this period?

Answer:

If so then they should be charged rent based on their income. In transitional housing maximum tenure is 18 months. Tenants are required to pay income based rent and claim CRA.

ABORIGINAL SERVICES

Question:

What is DCJ doing to ensure that Aboriginal people have access to culturally safe accommodation and support?

Answer:

An Aboriginal Coordination Group has been established under the Sydney Rough Sleeping COVID-19 Taskforce. Innari, Homelessness NSW and DCJ are working together on a co-ordinated response to support Aboriginal people sleeping rough during COVID-19. The group is currently considering:

- Co-location of Aboriginal people sleeping rough in one hotel for cultural safety
- Resources to provide Aboriginal identified support to people once they are in TA.

The NSW Government has committed an additional \$14.32m in funding for Temporary Accommodation provision. DCJ has prepaid for an additional 300 rooms across metropolitan Sydney to accommodate people experiencing street homelessness to support additional system capacity during COVID-19. Assertive Outreach teams aim to get people into TA as quickly as possible, with support from health services where needed.

In addition, DCJ is coordinating increased assertive outreach patrols on a daily basis with homelessness providers, health services and Council to assist people experiencing street sleeping to access temporary accommodation (TA) in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The key message being communicated to people sleeping rough is "it is not safe for you to sleep rough and it is possible that you may not be allowed to sleep rough in the near future. Please accept temporary accommodation for your own health's sake. We will give you one month of TA from now."

DCJ has modified assertive outreach practices to maintain social distancing, including requiring verbal instead of written consent for support.

DCJ and Community Housing Providers will now provide people experiencing street homelessness with an initial one month of TA. This will be extended as needed.

Support services and health services will work with people in TA to exit them to longer term housing options as quickly as possible within the resources available.

Question:

What accommodation is available to Aboriginal people who are sleeping rough, or are being released from custody?

Answer:

DCJ Housing and Corrective Services NSW have been working in partnership to deliver better housing support for people leaving prison, with a focus on systemic change to foster early communications between agencies prior to an inmate's release. A pilot is underway in four prisons which allows for holistic pre planning to be undertaken with inmates and the most suitable housing assistance provided post release.

In addition to the pilot, changes have also been recently introduced across all prisons to allow inmates to complete applications for housing support online, rather than over the phone, and up to four weeks prior to release. These changes will give people leaving time more opportunity to secure appropriate housing support prior to release.

Question:

Which Aboriginal specific services are continuing to operate, what services are they providing, and how can clients access these services?

Answer:

Services are responding in different ways to COVID-19. A central register has been established to track service changes, capacity reductions, and closures for homelessness and DFV services including:

- Specialist Homelessness Services program,
- Inner City Restoration,
- Homeless Youth Assistance Program,
- Service Support Fund,
- Youth Crisis Accommodation Enhancement,
- Domestic Violence Response Enhancement,
- Staying Home Leaving Violence and the
- Integrated Domestic and Family Violence Service.

The register will provide an overall picture of service delivery impacts.

CLIENT RIGHTS

Question:

What is the NSW Government doing to ensure that all government agencies treat vulnerable people with dignity and respect their civil rights during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Answer:

On 27 March 2020 the NSW Government released the second stage of its economic package aimed at keeping people in jobs, helping businesses and supporting the most vulnerable in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The \$34.34million funding package will provide immediate assistance to people impacted by COVID-19 across the state.

It includes support for people to access emergency accommodation to enable them to self-isolate, as well as rental subsidies to enable people to access or sustain private rental accommodation during this challenging time.

The package includes \$34.34m in funding to prevent homelessness, specifically:

- \$14.32m for emergency accommodation
- \$20.02m for rental subsidies to support people that have experienced a financially

destabilising event, households impacted by domestic and family violence and young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

This funding boost will provide emergency accommodation for those most in need, as well as keeping people in stable, affordable housing during this challenging time.

ESSENTIAL SERVICE DELIVERY

Question:

Reference was made to non-essential services if additional resources was required. What is meant by non-essential services?

Answer:

We understand that you may need to scale down non-essential services (e.g. group work, non-intensive case management support) to ensure essential services can continue. Please inform your DCJ contract manager if you plan to make any changes to service delivery.

Please consider ways to contact other people you provide a service to, who are vulnerable but may not access an essential service. Support for these clients may shift from face to face, to regular phone contact.

ROUGH SLEEPING

Question:

People sleeping rough need to maintain their personal hygiene as a matter of public safety. Can NSW Government work with Local Councils and other partners to safely open public facilities for showering, laundry, hand washing and other sanitation needs; and safe (non-touch) water outlets for clean drinking water?

Answer:

In order to assist people sleeping rough, DCJ is offering people extended Temporary Accommodation. In this accommodation will be facilities to maintain their personal hygiene.

END OF SHS Webinar 31 March 2020 pre and post questions

Published Content

The content on this page and subsequent pages does not require endorsement.

It is provided as a reference only.

Website: www.facs.nsw.gov.au

The following information for the SHS sector has already been published and **does not require endorsement**.

[Home](#)

[Deliver homelessness services](#)

[Updates for the SHS sector](#)

[People sleeping rough and COVID-19 – DCJ and homelessness sector response](#)

People sleeping rough and COVID-19 – DCJ and homelessness sector response

Last published 23 Mar 2020

People sleeping rough are highly vulnerable to COVID-19 due to a high rate of respiratory and other physical and mental health issues.

The NSW Premier has announced that NSW will proceed to a more comprehensive shutdown of non-essential services over the next 48 hours in an effort to limit the spread of COVID-19. Specialist Homelessness Services are essential services.

The healthiest and safest place for people sleeping rough during the shutdown period is in accommodation. DCJ assertive outreach teams and homelessness services (e.g assertive outreach, drop in and other services) that work with people sleeping rough need to refer and encourage them to access specialist homelessness services where available and Temporary Accommodation via [Link2Home](#) where crisis accommodation is unavailable.

DCJ teams and homelessness services undertaking this work need to do so in a way that adheres to the social distancing advice from NSW Health in order to minimise the risk of spreading COVID-19 to people sleeping rough and to minimise risks for workers.

Where possible this should be done by phone, however, given the client group, it is anticipated that this may be challenging. Where advice is being provided face to face, social distancing needs to be maintained and the length of contact minimised to below 15 minutes – staff should verbally advise of the need to move into accommodation and follow their normal procedure for getting people sleeping rough into a specialist homelessness service or Temporary Accommodation.

Staff should also provide information on COVID-19 symptoms and information on where to seek help should symptoms develop. [AskLizzy](#) has information on symptoms and health service contact details as does DCJ District offices.

Where possible, DCJ teams and Specialist Homelessness Services should develop a way of maintaining regular telephone contact with the client once accommodated in order to monitor any development of COVID-19 symptoms and to provide referral to health services, if required.

Website: www.facs.nsw.gov.au

The following information for the SHS sector has already been published and **does not require endorsement.**

[Home](#)

[Deliver homelessness services](#)

[Updates for the SHS sector](#)

[Important information about COVID-19 for SHS providers](#)

Important information about COVID-19 for SHS providers

Published: 20 March

Last Update: 3 April

The situation regarding the novel coronavirus COVID-19 continues to progress in NSW. We recognise this is impacting the homelessness sector both personally and professionally and we thank you for your continued efforts in supporting people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

The Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) is actively monitoring the situation and we'll continue to provide regular updates.

This page includes information on:

Where to get the latest information about COVID-19

Practical resources on the control and management of infectious diseases

Service continuity and essential homelessness services

What DCJ is doing to support service providers

Guidelines for Homelessness Accommodation during COVID-19

We have developed [Guidelines for Homelessness Accommodation during COVID-19](#) in consultation with the industry peaks.

These guidelines provide tools and techniques to help you manage homelessness accommodation sites for adults and young people during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Note: these guidelines may be updated as health information changes.

What to do if a staff member or a client is suspected or confirmed to be infectious?

If you receive a report of a client or staff member being infected, please check first with the local Public Health Unit by calling the state-wide number: [1300 066 055](tel:1300066055).

If the infection is confirmed, please immediately contact your DCJ Contract Manager to discuss an appropriate response.

If you have staff members that test positive for COVID-19, or are undergoing testing because they are considered at-risk, and this disrupts your staffing levels and service delivery, please contact your DCJ Contract Manager to discuss an appropriate response.

Where can I get the latest information?

We strongly encourage you to follow the [advice from NSW Health in relation to COVID-19](#).

For more information on COVID-19 please refer to the [coronavirus information \(COVID-19\) for service providers](#) webpage.

The Australian Government Department of Health issues a [daily alert](#) on the latest medical advice and official reports.

The [Disease Toolkit for Continuums of Care: Preventing & Managing the Spread of Infectious Disease With Shelters](#) provides useful information on managing infectious diseases in refuge settings.

NCOSS have also recently issued a [COVID-19 Community Sector Resource](#) which contains useful information to help plan for business continuity.

What is DCJ doing?

To help us better understand where additional supports may be required across the sector, your DCJ Contract Manager will contact you over the next few days to better understand your organisation's capacity to respond. This will include discussions about your Business Continuity Plan and the preparations you are making for your clients and staff.

The information you provide will be critical in informing local plans for responding to COVID-19.

If you are experiencing difficulties in accessing hand sanitisers or other critical supplies, please advise us. Your District Contract Manager will be an important contact during this period of uncertainty.

DCJ is committed to working with you to ensure continuity of service delivery. If your organisation experiences staff shortages due to COVID-19 and can access casual workers to fill in or pay overtime, we encourage you to do this.

If you are concerned about the budget implications of this please contact your District Contract Manager, as subject to their approval, these costs will be covered by DCJ.

DCJ is currently seeking to maximise opportunities with temporary accommodation providers to support self-isolation for some clients, and we will provide you with further updates as more information becomes available.

If you need to access temporary accommodation for affected clients to ensure they can self-isolate, please discuss with your District Contract Manager and DCJ will cover the costs for this.

Service continuity for essential homelessness services

Essential service delivery includes all forms of crisis refuge accommodation (e.g. young people, people experiencing domestic and family violence, single adults etc.) and services working directly with people sleeping rough. If you are unable to maintain essential service delivery due to issues such as staff shortages, contact your DCJ Contract Manager to discuss an appropriate response.

We understand it may be necessary to scale down non-essential services (e.g. group work, non-intensive case management support) to ensure essential services can continue to be delivered during this time. This should be discussed with your DCJ Contract Manager and approval sought before changes are made to service delivery.

In situations where a service needs to close due to the impact of the COVID-19 please ensure you provide early notification to your District Contract Manager so that the Housing Contact Centre can arrange alternative accommodation.

Many of our clients are already experiencing a range of hardships and vulnerabilities and it is important that we maintain a strong level of support, whilst reinforcing our care of staff and volunteers. We ask that you consider alternative methods of contact for those who are vulnerable but may not be accessing an essential service. Support for these clients may shift from face to face, to regular phone contact.

To support the delivery of services, please ensure you continue to update the Vacancy Management System (VMS) in CIMS daily.

We will continue to communicate with you regularly and provide you with key resources to enable you to continue to support people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Thanks for your ongoing efforts.

Published: 20 March 2020

Last updated: 03 Apr 2020

End of page

Website: coronavirus dcj

The following information for Service Providers **has already been published and does not require endorsement.**

Location: <https://coronavirus.dcj.nsw.gov.au/services/service-providers>

Service Providers

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented the human services sector with some challenging scenarios and, while there's a lot of information out there, you may still have questions about how to navigate this rapidly changing situation.

DCJ and the NSW Council of Social Services (NCOSS) will be communicating via regular video updates in the hope of addressing your concerns and uncertainty.

We've also set up a dedicated email address, COVID19.Support, where you can send your specific questions.

On this page

- [Latest video message](#)
- [Managing impacts to service delivery](#)
- [Additional information for specific DCJ programs](#)
- [Assistance available from the Australian Government](#)
- [What is the coronavirus \(COVID-19\)?](#)
- [How can you slow the spread of COVID-19?](#)
- [Working with staff and clients](#)
- [Home self-isolation](#)
- [What to do if you feel unwell](#)
- [Helpful resources](#)

You can also find [safety and wellbeing resources](#) below.

Recent video messages

- 5 April 2020: [Adapting to new ways of delivering services during COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- 3 April 2020: [Preparing for spike in DFV during COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- 29 March 2020: [Continuing to provide essential services](#) - You can [find information](#) to help you keep safe when working with clients.
- 20 March 2020: [Keeping our service partners informed](#)

The situation regarding the COVID-19 continues to progress in NSW. We recognise this is impacting providers both personally and professionally, and we thank you for your continued efforts in supporting children and families in NSW.

We understand that ongoing announcements about COVID-19 may cause some confusion, particularly around essential services. Services for vulnerable children, families and individuals are essential and should continue.

We will work with you during this challenging time. We realise that this may require flexible and different approaches so that you can keep staff and clients safe and continue to provide services.

We encourage services to prepare contingency plans in the event of rapid escalation of COVID-19 transmission in NSW. NGOs with residential programs will need to prioritise preparedness planning.

We encourage you to put the most ideal arrangements in place in these circumstances to best serve the needs of your clients. That is, what is the best available response option after evaluating the risks?

It's likely a second wave of COVID-19 will coincide with seasonal flu. So, ensure your contingency planning considers the service disruptions that would occur in the event of a combination of COVID-19 pandemic and severe seasonal flu this winter.

People with underlying illnesses that make them more [vulnerable to respiratory disease](#) are at increased risk. NGOs need to assess, for their particular populations, what their vulnerabilities are and how they can be mitigated.

Managing impacts to service delivery, and notifying DCJ

We understand it may be necessary to scale down non-essential services to ensure essential services can continue to be delivered during this time. If the contracted obligations of your organisation are impacted by COVID-19, please inform your DCJ contract manager.

Many of our clients are already experiencing a range of hardships and vulnerabilities and it is important that we maintain a strong level of support, whilst reinforcing our care of staff and volunteers.

What does 'service continuity' look like?

To prevent the spread of COVID-19 you may need to change the way you deliver services to ensure service continuity to our clients. Your funding will continue if you have to make changes to implement [social distancing](#) and increase protective measures.

Examples of measures already implemented by service providers include:

- continuing core services to clients, but reducing or staggering opening times for drop in clients
- limiting face-to-face interactions to minimise the risk of spreading the virus
- using all forms of technology and communication apps to ensure that they can communicate with clients and access their information
- Having private and confidential open spaces in offices for face-to-face interactions to minimise contact in enclosed environments
- only providing take away meal services rather than sit down meals and encouraging clients not to loiter at the premises
- introducing protocols for home visits, cancelling non-essential group activities and moving programs online
- ensuring offices have new cleaning and sanitisation programs, including mandatory hand washing before and after every face-to-face client interaction and clients are asked to do the same
- mandatory online e-learning on [preventing infection](#).

Will your funding be affected if a service needs to close or reduce due to a suspected or confirm case?

No. Funding will continue if a service need to shut down or reduce services because of a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19. Advise your DCJ contract manager of events/actions causing a disruption or scaling back of service delivery. We will take into account legitimate service disruptions attributable to COVID-19.

Please ensure that you notify each of your funding bodies – state and/or federal – what your situation is and what you plan to do.

What you should ask in advance of providing a service

For the delivery of frontline services that involve face-to-face contact with clients, either at their home or another location, it is suggested that the following protocol is followed. This is consistent with the advice we are providing to our own caseworkers and staff.

If possible, call your clients ahead of time and ask them:

- ‘Have you or anyone in your household returned from a higher risk country within the last 14 days?’
- ‘Is anyone exhibiting flu-like symptoms or any of the symptoms associated with COVID-19?’
- ‘Have you or anyone in your household been required to isolate?’

If you cannot call your clients ahead of time, you can ask the same questions shortly after arriving or receiving your clients face-to-face.

If the answer is yes, assess whether the visit can be delayed or if you can support clients over the phone.

Use your organisation’s risk assessment strategy to assess the risk and to set mitigating controls.

Mitigating controls could include:

- making the contact other than face-to-face (where appropriate), for example speaking over the telephone
- wearing personal protective equipment (PPE)
- limiting contact or avoiding contact until the 14-day isolation period has expired.

NSW Health has advised people who are in self-isolation to wear a mask when needing to be in contact with others. But avoid unnecessary use of masks.

Visit the [NSW Health website](#) for further information.

If you have concerns about self-isolation arrangements, such as a client not following the advice of NSW Health, please contact your local Public Health Unit on [1300 066 055](#) for advice.

Additional information for specific DCJ programs

[Authorisation of staff to provide foster care during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) : information from the Children's Guardian.

Information for [Permanency Support Program](#) providers

Information for providers of [Specialist Homelessness Services \(SHS\)](#)

Information for providers of [Targeted Early Intervention \(TEI\)](#)

Information for providers of [Intensive Therapeutic Care \(ITC\)](#)

Assistance available from the Australian Government

Your organisation [may be eligible for assistance from the Australian Government](#).

Cash flow assistance for businesses is aimed at assisting them to manage cash flow challenges and helping them retain their employees. The measures are designed to support employing small- and medium-sized businesses and to improve business confidence.

What is the coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Novel coronavirus (COVID-19) was first reported in Wuhan City in China in December 2019. Cases have now been confirmed in multiple countries around the world.

While there is still much to be learned about infection with COVID-19, it appears that the illness is much less severe than SARS or MERS, and some people with the infection may have only a mild illness.

The virus can cause a variety of symptoms, ranging from mild illness to pneumonia. People may experience:

- fever, cough, sore throat, nausea/vomiting, and difficulty breathing and/or;
 - difficulty breathing which is sign of possible pneumonia and require immediate medical attention.
 - It can take up to 14 days for symptoms to show after a person has been infected.
-

How can you slow the spread of COVID-19?

By practising hygiene and self-protection measures for acute respiratory infections, such as washing hands and covering your mouth while coughing or sneezing.

If you are visiting individuals or families it may be helpful to talk calmly with parents and children about the coronavirus. You can provide basic advice, and encourage them to:

- Cover coughs and sneezes. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or cough or sneeze into your sleeve/elbow. Place used tissues in a bin, then wash hands immediately.
- Wash hands often and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Dry with paper towel or hand dryer.
- Avoid touching their face and mouth especially after touching surfaces; for example, toilet doors.
- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser if hands aren't visibly dirty.
- Avoid close contact with anyone showing respiratory symptoms (like runny nose, cough or sore throat)
- Stay at home if they feel sick.
- Make sure they have enough of any medication they take to last a few weeks.

[Further advice about infection control and infographics](#) that can be given to clients.

Disability Services have developed an [e-learning module on preventing infection](#) which you may like to encourage staff to complete.

Working with staff and clients

What to do if a staff member or client has returned from any overseas destination?

As of 15 March 2020, the Prime Minister has advised that all overseas arrivals, including Australians returning from overseas, need to [self-isolate](#) at home for 14 days after arriving in Australia.

Let clients of your service know about the new directive from the government and tell them to monitor their health for 14 days if they're returning from overseas.

What to do if a staff member or a client is suspected or confirmed to be infectious?

If you receive a report of a client or staff member being infected, please check first with the local Public Health Unit by calling the state-wide number: 1300 066 055.

If you have staff members that test positive for COVID-19, or are undergoing testing because they are considered at-risk, and this disrupts your staffing levels and service delivery, please contact your DCJ contract manager to discuss an appropriate response.

What to do if staff or clients have been in contact with a person who has COVID-19?

A person must [self-isolate](#) for 14 days from the time they were in contact with anyone confirmed to have COVID-19.

They must stay at home in isolation, except when seeking medical care.

As per advice from NSW Health, when seeking medical care, please tell your staff and clients to tell the medical provider if they've been overseas. NSW Health advises they wear a [surgical mask \(if available\)](#) when attending a GP clinic or hospital, otherwise request a mask when they arrive at the treatment location.

What to do if your staff come into contact with someone in self-isolation

[Casual contact](#) means being face-to-face for less than 15 minutes, or being in the same closed space for less than 2 hours.

[Close contact](#) means being face-to-face for at least 15 minutes, or being in the same closed space for at least 2 hours. However, residential services should be aware that – where there is a confirmed case in a residential setting – there is the potential for transmission to clients and staff to occur via contaminated surfaces, even where close contact with an infected individual has not occurred.

If a staff member has had close contact with someone-in self-isolation, discuss working from home options. If working from home is not feasible, your organisation's leave policy will apply.

If a staff member has had casual contact with someone-in self-isolation, there's no need for your staff member to change their working arrangements unless they become unwell.

If a staff member consults a medical practitioner and is being tested for COVID-19, tell them not to come into the workplace.

Is contact between children and their birth families considered a reasonable excuse to leave the home?

Yes. Children and families can leave the home, and/or gather in a public place, in order to continue existing contact arrangements.

Contact time with birth families is exempt from social gathering laws because:

- it is part of a service that provides care and assistance to vulnerable persons
- in some cases, families are gathering to fulfil a legal obligation.

Providing care and assistance to vulnerable persons

NSW Police will allow leaving the home and gathering for family contact because it is part of an essential service to vulnerable persons.

If contact time requires supervision, a supervisor is permitted to attend, as they will be providing care or assistance to a vulnerable person (i.e. the child or young person). The supervisor is permitted to travel for work that cannot be done from home.

Gathering Information to fulfil a legal obligation

Contact between children in OOHC and their birth families may also be gathering to fulfil a legal obligation if:

- contact time is part of a court order
- contact time is part of a court approved permanency plan or care plan.
- Can contact time take place in another person's (extended family) home?
- Yes. Contact between children and their birth families can take place in a person's home. The gathering restrictions only apply to public places.
- Restrictions on leaving home would normally stop gatherings at a private residence.
- However, when children and families are attending contact time at a person's home, or a private facility, they have a reasonable excuse for leaving home and travelling to that location. This is because they are doing so to fulfil existing arrangements for their children.
- If you're supervising or facilitating contact (by transporting the child or otherwise), you are travelling for work that cannot be done from home, and are permitted to travel.

Can service providers still supervise contact time?

Yes. Supervision of contact by a private citizen or paid person is permitted.

Staff supervising contact will be exempt from the restriction on public gatherings of two or more people because they are providing care or assistance to a vulnerable child.

Where supervision is court ordered, the exemption around fulfilling a legal obligation would also apply.

Individual service providers to determine whether this is a service they can or will provide in light of public health concerns.

If supervision of contact occurs in a person's home and there is an existing arrangement, then there is no breach of the restrictions on public gatherings or movement. A worker can travel to supervise contact where this is required for the person's work.

If service providers are unable to supervise contact time, can we assess grandparents or extended family members to supervise contact?

Yes. Supervision of contact by a private citizen is permitted and the same exemptions to social gathering and travelling for contact apply.

We recommend you provide the family member with a letter or other written evidence authorising them to supervise the contact. This could include a copy of the order if this is court ordered contact. If requested, the supervising family member can use this evidence to prove their reason for travelling or gathering.

Can someone who is self-isolating participate in contact time?

If a child, family member or supervisor is subject to a mandatory self-isolation order, they will not be permitted to participate in face-to-face contact. A self-isolation order will apply:

- after returning from international travel
- after leaving a vessel
- because they have been ordered to isolate as a result of contracting the virus or having close contact with the virus.
- Individuals who are self-isolating can participate in contact via phone or video call.

Home self-isolation

If staff or clients have either returned from overseas or have been identified as being in [close contact](#) with someone who's confirmed to have COVID-19 infection, NSW Health advises that they must:

- isolate at home until 14 days after they arrived back in Australia or were last exposed to an infectious person
- not leave the house, except to get medical care
- stay in a different room to other people in the household as much as possible, and wear a surgical mask when they're in the same room as another person and when seeking medical care
- use a separate bathroom, if one's available
- not go in to the workplace, school, or other public areas
- not use public transport, taxis or ride-share services
- watch for signs and symptoms:
- fever, cough, shortness of breath, and
- other early symptoms such as chills, body aches, sore throat, headache, runny nose, muscle pain or diarrhoea.

Check your organisation's leave policies to determine what may apply when staff need to self-isolate.

What to do if you feel unwell

If you develop any of the [COVID-19 symptoms](#), please consider the following:

- If you're seriously unwell and it's an emergency, call 000 immediately.

- Continue to keep yourself apart from other people as much as possible (for example, in a different room).
- Wear a surgical mask if you have one.
- Call your GP, local public health unit on 1300 066 055, or the National Coronavirus Health Information line 1800 020 080 so that a clinician can assess your risk and whether you're likely to require testing for COVID-19.
- Phone the emergency department of the hospital before going there so they can make arrangements for when you arrive to prevent the possible spread of infection to others.
- Don't travel on public transport; use taxis or ride-shares.
- Don't go out to any public places: schools, parks, shopping centres, etc.

Helpful resources

General information about COVID-19

[NSW Government website](#) – Official information and advice on COVID-19 for community and businesses in NSW, including information about symptoms, testing and social distancing.

[National Coronavirus Health Information line](#) – Call 1800 020 080 if you are seeking information on COVID-19. The line operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

[Australian Government Department of Health daily alert](#) - the latest medical advice and official reports.

Wellbeing and Safety

[SafeWork NSW hub](#) - a guide to help businesses comply with their obligations under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

[Safe Work Australia](#) - information on COVID-19 and work, health and safety.

[Information for small business owners](#) - tips and resources to help you manage your small business during the crisis and into the recovery phase.

Working with children and families

[Factsheet: Talking to children and families about COVID-19](#)

[Factsheet: Supporting children and families through the restoration process](#)

[Tip sheet: Family time during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

[Tip sheet: Case planning during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

[Tip sheet: Home visits during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

[Online mental health resources for professionals working with families](#) - an easy access A-Z toolkit on child, teenage and parent mental health and wellbeing.

[Domestic and family violence eSafety](#) - online safety help for domestic and family violence workers.

[Telethon kids](#) - advice for parents during the COVID-19 pandemic. Please note, this is a Western Australian resource, please refer to the [NSW Government website](#) for advice specific to NSW.

[COVID-19 family guide](#) - information and tips to help parents and carers cope with COVID-19.

Service delivery

[COVID-19 Community Sector Resource](#) - information for non-government service providers from the NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS). It contains useful information to help plan for business continuity, including:

- practical resources on the control and management of infectious diseases
- service continuity and essential homelessness services
- what DCJ is doing to support service providers.

[Justice Connect](#) – provides legal assistance and information for not-for-profit organisations. As part of the COVID-19 response, Justice Connect is providing legal help to affected community organisations and running a series of [webinars](#) on issues such as employment, contracts and annual general meetings.

Last updated: 14 Apr 2020

[Back to top](#)

Official information about Coronavirus (COVID-19) from the NSW Government

For information and advice on COVID-19 (coronavirus) for community and businesses in NSW

[NSW Government's response to COVID-19 \(coronavirus\)](#)

On 1 July 2019, the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) brought together the former departments of Family and Community Services (FACS) and Justice. While FACS no longer exists, our apology to the Stolen Generations stands. You can [read our apology to the Stolen Generations here](#).

Informed by lessons of the past, DCJ is improving how we work with Aboriginal people and communities. We listen and learn from the knowledge, strength and resilience of Stolen Generations Survivors, Aboriginal Elders and Aboriginal communities.

Find information on how our essential services will continue to work during the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Housing and Homelessness](#)

[Older people, people with disability and carers](#)

[Child and Family Services](#)

[Domestic and Family violence](#)

[Corrective Services](#)

[Service Providers](#)

[Courts, Tribunals and Legal Services](#)

[Information for staff](#)

[Youth Justice](#)

End of Page

Website: coronavirus dcj

The following information for Service Providers **has already been published and does not require endorsement.**

Location: <https://coronavirus.dcj.nsw.gov.au/services/housing-and-homelessness>

[Home](#)

[DCJ Services](#)

Housing and homelessness

DCJ Housing, Community Housing Providers and Specialist Homelessness Services continue to provide you accommodation and support. This has not changed.

On this page

[Housing Services](#)

[Homelessness Services](#)

Housing Services

How to contact us

For your safety and the well-being of our staff please call us instead of coming into our offices. Face to face services at Housing offices will now be by appointment only.

You can also access a range of services through:

- Link2Home: [1800 152 152](tel:1800152152)
- Housing Contact Centre: [1800 422 322](tel:1800422322)
- [call your local office](#)
- the MyHousing app from the [App Store](#) or [Google Play](#), or
- by going to www.facs.nsw.gov.au/myhousing
- contact the Aboriginal Housing Office: [1800 727 555](tel:1800727555) or <https://www.aho.nsw.gov.au/>

A letter from the Minister and fact sheet has been sent to all public housing and Aboriginal Housing Office tenants in NSW. It explains how DCJ Housing is responding to COVID-19, and provides more information about additional Centrelink payments, rent charges, office arrangements, self-isolation and maintenance.

[Letter from the Minister PDF, 597.97 KB](#)

[Fact sheet: COVID-19 advice for DCJ Housing tenants PDF, 252.73 KB](#)

Outreach to vulnerable tenants

DCJ Housing is making outreach phone calls to elderly and vulnerable tenants to check on their welfare, identify any assistance they may need, and provide information on preventative health measures.

At home visits

Housing staff are trained on how to best protect themselves and tenants from COVID-19.

If you are due to have a visit from DCJ Housing and you feel unwell, or you are self-isolating or under quarantine, please call us before your appointment.

Our staff will not visit you at home if they're unwell or may have been exposed to COVID-19. We will also call you before any visit to make sure you're okay and not at risk.

Coronavirus support payments

The Australian Government has announced a number of additional payments as part of its response to the Coronavirus outbreak. These include one-off Economic Support payments of \$750 and a temporary payment of \$550 per fortnight, known as the Coronavirus Supplement.

DCJ Housing will not be counting these additional payments as assessable income for the purpose of social housing eligibility or any rental subsidy. Those receiving these payments will retain the benefit in full.

Property maintenance and additional cleaning

Our maintenance contractors continue to undertake cleaning and maintenance activities, following all safety and hygiene guidelines.

We are increasing common area cleaning programs in multi-unit and high rise building complexes in the inner city. We will expand this service out to more unit complex sites in the near future.

The program will focus on cleaning high traffic areas and touch points in these unit blocks, such as lift buttons, door handles, bin chutes and doors, stairwells, handrails, letterboxes and shared laundries.

Tenants are encouraged to follow NSW Health advice such as regularly washing your hands, maintaining good health and hygiene and being mindful of others in shared spaces.

Additional private rental assistance

On 27 March 2020, the NSW Government announced an additional \$34 million to prevent and respond to homelessness in response to COVID-19. This includes \$20 million to accelerate pathways for existing clients of homelessness services and priority social housing applicants to secure stable housing in the private rental market through Rent Choice Assist, Start Safely and Rent Choice Youth.

Homelessness services

Where to find help

Help is available if you are homeless or at risk of becoming homelessness.

Link2home is the statewide homelessness information and referral telephone service. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Link2Home can be contacted by phone on [1800 152 152](tel:1800152152).

[Ask Izzy](#) is a search tool to help people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness find shelter, food, health and other critical support services.

Support for rough sleepers

DCJ assertive outreach teams and homelessness services (eg assertive outreach, drop in and other services) are continuing to work with people sleeping rough to offer accommodation and encourage them to engage with support services.

Assertive outreach teams adhere to advice from NSW Health, including social distancing, in order to minimise the risk of spreading COVID-19 to people sleeping rough and to minimise risks for workers. A General Practitioner joins assertive outreach patrols in the City of Sydney.

Teams also distribute hand sanitiser where supplies permit and provide information on COVID-19 symptoms and where to seek help should symptoms develop.

More information is available on the [Important information about COVID-19 for SHS providers](#) page.

Temporary Accommodation

DCJ has a range of Temporary Accommodation options available across NSW, including accommodation suitable for self-isolation.

On 27 March 2020, the NSW Government announced an additional \$34 million to prevent and respond to homelessness in response to COVID-19. This includes an increase of \$14 million to support more people with Temporary Accommodation, including to accommodate rough sleepers for as long as is necessary to protect them at this time.

The length of Temporary Accommodation assistance offered is based on an assessment of a client's immediate housing needs. The usual limit of 28 days of Temporary Accommodation in a year will not be applied for rough sleepers and other people who are homeless during the pandemic.

The initial period of Temporary Accommodation provided for new homeless clients has been increased from 2 nights to 5 nights. This initial period is used to provide accommodation while identifying what medium and longer-term options the person may have. This can be extended over the phone, without needing to visit the local housing office.

Specialist Homelessness Services

DCJ is working with Specialist Homelessness Services providers on local service continuity plans. This includes prioritising essential crisis accommodation and rough sleeper supports, assisting providers with additional staffing costs and supporting clients who need to self-isolate with Temporary Accommodation. More information can be found on the [Important information about COVID-19 for SHS providers](#) page.

DCJ has established a Sydney Rough Sleeper COVID-19 Taskforce with the City of Sydney, local health districts and homelessness services to support local decision-making, coordination and communication.

For more information

Information for people who rent their home: [Renting & Coronavirus: What you need to know](#) (Tenants' Union of NSW)

Last updated: 07 Apr 2020

END OF DOCUMENT