

COVID-19 – Frequently asked questions For HYAP and Youth SHS Providers Issue 1: April 2020

This document has been drafted to respond to specific questions raised by NSW Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) and Homeless Youth Assistance Program (HYAP) services delivering accommodation assistance to children and young people during the COVID-19 crisis.

Advice responding to questions regarding public health directions is the responsibility of NSW Health and may change quickly as the situation evolves. For this reason, links to information on the NSW Health website have been provided wherever there is relevant advice that answers the question. Please note, as NSW health continually updates these links, this information is also subject to change.

This document is current as at April 2020 and further issues are anticipated to update this information and respond to new questions as they emerge. Please note that the advice contained within this document may not be the most up-to-date advice post publication. Please check for the latest issue for the most up-to-date information.

DCJ Child and Family and the Office of the Children’s Guardian have been consulted in the development of this document.

Contents

1.1 Frequently Asked Questions	3
1.11 What should a service provider do if a young person is newly homeless or at risk of homelessness?.....	3
1.12 What should a young person do if they are at risk of homelessness or need assistance?.....	3
1.13 Will HYAP and SHS services for children and young people remain open?	3
1.14 Do we need to reduce capacity to 1 person per 4m ² ?	3
1.15 Where can I go for specific health guidance related to managing homelessness accommodation?.....	3
1.16 What is the Office of Children’s Guardian advice?.....	4
1.2 Safety and infection control	4
1.21 What special measures should we put in place for our staff and residents of accommodation services?	4
1.22 How do we manage the needs of particularly vulnerable staff members and maintain services as a result?	4
1.3 Suspected or known cases COVID–19	5
1.31 Is there a standard procedure if someone residing in SHS or HYAP accommodation tests positive to COVID-19?	5
1.32 What can I do if my organisation is unable to establish suitable isolation for a client with diagnosed or suspected COVID–19?	5
1.33 What is the procedure for accessing Alternative Accommodation (AA) for a client not already accommodated within the service?	5
1.34 What is the procedure for accessing Alternative Accommodation (AA) for a client already accommodated within the service?	6
1.35 Who has responsibility for the supervision and support of unaccompanied children temporarily residing in Alternative Accommodation (AA)?.....	6
1.4 Managing behaviour	6
1.42 Can I use brokerage to buy prepaid phones and Internet packages for clients?	7
1.43 What if a young person refuses to self-isolate?	7
1.44 Will a young person face criminal charges if they refuse to follow lock down procedure?	7
1.45 Is there a protocol between NSW Police and DCJ funded services?	7
1.5 Maintaining essential services	7
1.51 How do I ensure HYAP and youth SHS services can continue to provide essential support?	7
1.54 Can a staff member care for a child or young person with COVID-19 in their home?.....	8
1.55 Concerned about pregnant young people in accommodation settings?	9
General information and links	9
What is Coronavirus or COVID-19?.....	9
Where is the best place to go for information?	9
Latest statistics:	9
Are you worried or feeling anxious?	9

1.1 Frequently Asked Questions

1.11 What should a service provider do if a young person is newly homeless or at risk of homelessness?

With new social restrictions in place to manage the spread of COVID-19, there may be an increase of young people who are now homeless due to breakdowns in housing situations (family, sharehouse and others). Mandatory reporting guidelines remain the same during this time.

Any young person who is at risk of homelessness should be reported to the Child Protection Helpline on 132 111. All Homeless Youth Assistance Program (HYAP) and Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) need to follow the mandatory reporting guidelines and should make a report either by phone, or if non urgent by e-report at <http://reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s/>

1.12 What should a young person do if they are at risk of homelessness or need assistance?

All young people requiring assistance should contact the Child Protection Helpline on 132 111.

Any young person (18-25 years) who was formally in statutory out of home care (OOHC) and needs assistance should contact their local Community Services Centre or afterhours Child Protection Helpline.

1.13 Will HYAP and SHS services for children and young people remain open?

Yes, services for children and young people are essential. This includes both accommodation and support services.

1.14 Do we need to reduce capacity to 1 person per 4m²?

The Australian Government's four square metre per person rule does not apply to essential gatherings necessary for the normal operation of:

- a disability facility
- an aged care facility
- crisis and transitional accommodation services.

The Public Health (COVID-19 Gatherings) Order 2020 and the schedule of 'essential gatherings' as at 21 March 2020 is below (noting this may be updated over time but was in place at time of publishing the Q&A).

https://gazette.legislation.nsw.gov.au/so/download.w3p?id=Gazette_2020_2020-53.pdf

1.15 Where can I go for specific health guidance related to managing homelessness accommodation?

The Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) has developed guidelines - *Guidelines: Homelessness Accommodation and COVID19*.

<https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/providers/homelessness-services/updates/important-information-about-covid-19-for-shs-providers>

1.16 What is the Office of Children’s Guardian advice?

The Department of communities and Justice require all Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) and Homeless Youth Assistance Program (HYAP) services delivering assistance to children and young people to comply with Child Safe practices as outlined by the Office the Children’s Guardian.

The Office the Children’s Guardian has developed advice specific to COVID–19 which can be found at:
<https://www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/about-us/covid-19-response>

1.2 Safety and infection control

1.21 What special measures should we put in place for our staff and residents of accommodation services?

The most important thing you can do is follow NSW Health and NSW Government advice.

In addition to steps you can personally take to practice good hygiene, measures can be put in place for staff and residents in accommodation services that can significantly reduce the risk of catching and spreading COVID-19.

Please refer to the *Guidelines: Homelessness Accommodation and COVID19* for information on service-wide risk mitigation strategies.

1.22 How do we manage the needs of particularly vulnerable staff members and maintain services as a result?

The *Guidelines: Homelessness Accommodation and COVID19* provides information on groups of people who are considered to be particularly vulnerable to COVID–19.

Measures need to be put in place to protect vulnerable staff in order to continue to provide core services to clients.

Services are encouraged to adopt some of the below measures to protect particularly vulnerable staff;

- Remove vulnerable staff from frontline roles and reallocate them into roles in which they can work from home.
- Reallocate staff who are not considered particularly vulnerable into frontline roles.
- Avoid all face to face interactions and use all forms of technology and communication apps to ensure these staff can communicate with clients. This includes holding all meetings via conferencing and phone call.
- Adapt service delivery to allow vulnerable staff to work with clients via phone, videoconferencing or email.

The [NSW Health](#) website has up to date information on groups that are considered particularly vulnerable.

1.3 Suspected or known cases COVID–19

1.31 Is there a standard procedure if someone residing in SHS or HYAP accommodation tests positive to COVID-19?

All SHS and HYAP accommodation services are encouraged to develop a plan for responding to situations where clients or staff advise they have tested positive to COVID–19. Plans may vary between providers in order to respond effectively to the unique configurations and client mix of each accommodation setting.

The *Guidelines: Homelessness Accommodation and COVID19* provides information on what standard items should be considered by all providers when developing plans to isolate confirmed or likely cases of COVID-19.at

Additional funds to cover staffing costs can be requested in the event that a staff member tests positive for COVID-19 and additional staff are required. Services will need to follow the new business rules developed by DCJ to support this process and email their District contracting mailbox stipulating the amount and length of time additional funding will be required.

1.32 What can I do if my organisation is unable to establish suitable isolation for a client with diagnosed or suspected COVID–19?

In some instances services may need to temporarily expand their accommodation capacity in order to meet the needs of existing clients and respond to NSW Health directions. Temporary accommodation is not considered to be a suitable option for young people under 16 years. An Alternative Accommodation (AA) Policy is being developed in response to COVID-19, which enables young people 12-15 years to 'self-isolate' in alternative accommodation. Business rules have been developed for DCJ Districts and providers to manage how this process can be funded.

DCJ have agreed to cover the cost of establishing AA sites for unaccompanied children and young people.

Please refer to the response to 1.34 for further information on how this will be managed.

1.33 What is the procedure for accessing Alternative Accommodation (AA) for a client not already accommodated within the service?

Temporary accommodation is not considered to be a suitable option for young people under 16 years.

An Alternative Accommodation (AA) Policy is being developed in response to COVID-19, which enables young people 12-15 years to 'self-isolate' in alternative accommodation. New business rules have been developed to manage this process.

If a young person not already accommodated within the service requires Alternative Accommodation (AA) because the service and other suitable accommodation services are at capacity, service providers should contact Link2home (1800 152 152), the local DCJ Housing Office or the relevant Community Housing Provider as per the existing process.

(Note: Please check with your DCJ contract manager as to whether the above advice has since been updated before arranging AA for this unaccompanied children and young people aged 12 to 15 years.)

1.34 What is the procedure for accessing Alternative Accommodation (AA) for a client already accommodated within the service?

There may be some instances where a client who is already accommodated within the service may need AA in order for the service and the client to manage isolation and health requirements during the COVID-19 crisis. In the first instance, where other suitable accommodation cannot be sourced with another provider, SHS and HYAP services will need to use their existing budget to source AA for a young person residing in their service.

If a HYAP or SHS provider cannot source AA within its own budget and a young person requires AA due to a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19, the provider can contact their relevant DCJ Contract Manager to make arrangements for establishing AA.

New business rules have been established within DCJ to support the approval of funding and sourcing of AA in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

(Note: Please check with your DCJ contract manager as to whether the above advice has since been updated before arranging AA for this unaccompanied children and young people aged 12 to 15 years.)

1.35 Who has responsibility for the supervision and support of unaccompanied children temporarily residing in Alternative Accommodation (AA)?

It is the responsibility of the SHS or HYAP provider to provide adequate 24/7 on site supervision and support for unaccompanied children aged 12 to 15 years temporarily residing in AA.

Additional funds to cover staffing costs can be requested in the event that additional staff are required to provide support to a young person in AA. Noting that relevant documentation for the temporary labour is required, noting this may be from a recruitment agency or from another relevant agency (e.g. another service provider).

Please contact your contract manager for advice if DCJ approval of funding is required. Note that AA sourcing arrangements may vary depending on the district.

(Note: further policy guidance is currently being developed by DCJ in relation to the application of AA for unaccompanied children and young people aged 12 to 15 years presenting to homelessness services. Please check with your contract manager as to whether the above advice has since been updated before arranging AA for this unaccompanied children and young people aged 12 to 15 years.)

1.4 Managing behaviour

1.41 What is the best way to manage behaviour and compliance?

SHS and HYAP providers should proactively engage young people in activities designed to:

- ease anxiety;
- increase their sense of control over their safety and well-being; and
- provide alternative and connected ways for enjoyment and fun. (For example, consider planning some online competitions between clients within a refuge or accommodation setting or even between refuges and accommodation settings. You might like to set up a competition using <https://kahoot.com>)

For more ideas on the types of activities that services could proactively plan please refer to the Yfoundations website (<http://yfoundations.org.au>) and to the *Guidelines: Homelessness Accommodation and COVID19*.

1.42 Can I use brokerage to buy prepaid phones and Internet packages for clients?

SHS and HYAP providers are encouraged to use brokerage to buy prepaid telephones and Internet packages to ensure children and young people can remain connected to support, significant family and kin and each other throughout social distancing, isolation and further lockdowns.

1.43 What if a young person refuses to self-isolate?

In scenarios where there's 'refusal' from a young person who had tested positive to the virus to self-isolate, NSW Health and Police will consider their response on a case by case basis.

You should contact the National Coronavirus Health Information line on 1800 020 080.

Police are able to legally enforce a public health order on the advice of NSW Health. However, young people should be supported within the service (or their home) if possible.

In complex and critical situations, where a centralised government response is required, contact your contract manager for up-to-date advice. The Youth Homelessness Team, can also help to escalate the matter to the NSW State Health Emergency Operations Centre if a young person's refusal is placing the community at risk.

Note: DCJ is currently working to provide additional advice on how to manage these instances if or when they occur.

1.44 Will a young person face criminal charges if they refuse to follow lock down procedure?

If a young person refuses to stay in a refuge after it has gone into lockdown the service is advised to notify the police as a matter of safety. While fines and jail time may apply to individuals who breach NSW Health directions, The Joint Protocol for young people in residential out-of-home-care requires the NSW Police Force to consider alternatives to criminal charges, when responding to incidents involving young people where appropriate.

Information on the responsibilities of the NSW Police Force to divert young people from the criminal justice system can be found in the *Young Offenders Act 1997*.

1.45 Is there a protocol between NSW Police and DCJ funded services?

Yes, DCJ is working to have this protocol explicitly extended to homelessness accommodation services delivered to unaccompanied children and young people. Once this has been finalised, further information about the protocol and the roles and responsibilities of NSW Police and HYAP and SHS service providers will be made available.

1.5 Maintaining essential services

1.51 How do I ensure HYAP and youth SHS services can continue to provide essential support?

Unaccompanied children and young people accessing homelessness services need a consistent and stable service response that maintains enough flexibility to respond to individual needs and circumstances.

Develop a plan to continue delivering services to unaccompanied children and young people accessing homelessness services and responding to the COVID-19 crisis.

In your plan consider **essential** and **non-essential** services:

Essential services

- Supporting young people and families experiencing difficulties/crisis/instability.
- Ensuring the Mandatory Reporter Guide (MRG) is used and Child Protection Helpline reports are made for all unaccompanied children aged 12 to 15 years as per the normal process
- Responding to safety issues and allegations
- Family reconnection activities
- Finding and checking on children and young people who are rough sleeping
- Working with families
- Considering and accepting referrals for new clients
- case coordination meetings.

In your plan you may want to consider how some of these services, such as case coordination meetings or family reconnection, could take place without meeting face-to-face.

Non-essential services

- Training and workshops
- Interagency meetings
- Conferences and seminars.

NCOSS have issued a COVID-19 Community Sector Resource to help you plan for service continuity in this challenging time.

1.53 Do casual staff and redeployed office staff need to have working with children checks?

The best way to know for sure whether a WWCC is required is to check the Office of the Children's Guardian website:

<https://www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/child-safe-organisations/working-with-children-check/employer/who-needs-a-working-with-children-check>

The Office of the Children's Guardian has updated procedures relating to maintaining WWCCs in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Information about these updated procedures can be found at:

<https://www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/about-us/news/thousands-have-their-working-with-children-clearances-extended>

1.54 Can a staff member care for a child or young person with COVID-19 in their home?

The Office of the Children's Guardian has made some recent changes to ensure that young people are continuing to receive the care they need during the COVID-19 outbreak. Amongst these is the provisional authorisation of staff as foster carers in emergency situations. This is to be done by a staff member in a designated agency who is known to the child and care may be provided at the child's residential facility or in the carers on home.

For more information on provisional authorisation for staff as foster carers, refer to the COVID-19 response fact sheet from the Office of the Children’s Guardian:

https://www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/542/COVID19_Emergency_authorisation_staff_carers.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y

1.55 Concerned about pregnant young people in accommodation settings?

For more information about COVID-19 and pregnancy visit

<https://ranzcoq.edu.au/statements-guidelines/covid-19-statement> (The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists).

General information and links

What is Coronavirus or COVID-19?

For up to date information on COVID-19 please refer to the following websites:

<https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/what-you-need-to-know-about-coronavirus-covid-19>

<https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/providers/children-families/deliver-bsp/coronavirus-information-for-bsp-ngos-faqs>

Where is the best place to go for information?

The [NSW Health](#) website remains the most up to date source with information regarding COVID-19 outbreak.

The [NSW Health](#) website contains information about:

- what is COVID-19
- what the symptoms are
- self-isolating
- social distancing
- face masks and more.

The *Guidelines: Homelessness Accommodation and COVID19* provides health guidance tailored specifically for homelessness accommodation services.

Latest statistics:

The [NSW Health](#) website contains the latest COVID-19 statistics.

Are you worried or feeling anxious?

Contact one of the services below for support or talk to your general practitioner.

- Lifeline Australia: 13 11 14 or [Lifeline Australia](#)
A crisis support service that provides short term support at any time for people who are having difficulty coping or staying safe.
- Kids Helpline: 1800 551800 or [Kids Helpline](#)
A free, private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25 years.
- NSW Mental Health Line: 1800 011 511
Mental health crisis telephone service in NSW.