

8<sup>th</sup> April 2020

## Mission Australia's Response to COVID-19

Mission Australia is responding to the evolving national health situation and the measures which are regularly announced by Federal and State Governments so that we can keep our staff and the people we serve safe and well.

At this stage we are working to maintain service continuity for our essential services across the country, including aged care and homelessness services, while many of our support staff are working remotely where possible.

The below is a short briefing to our Northern Territory key stakeholders on our response to date to COVID-19.

### **Planning and Coordination**

A National COVID-19 planning and response team has been established. This team has active engagement from the CEO and other members of the Executive, State Directors as well as corporate functions especially People and Culture, Communications and IT. This team is meeting daily to ensure effective planning and timely response.

Our local NT leadership team is meeting daily to co-ordinate the Mission Australia's NT response and provide service delivery direction to frontline services.

At the service level, every service in the Territory has developed a COVID-19 Action Plan to support existing Emergency Management Plans. The COVID-19 Action Plans cover responses related to prevention, communication, service continuity and risk management. The plans also include outbreak management plans and checklists. A more targeted and focused effort is currently on residential services nationally to ensure our planning is robust and to test the service's preparedness against various scenarios.

### **Prevention of Transmission of Infection**

Mission Australia is taking every precaution to protect each other and the people we serve. We're reinforcing the need for staff to take extra steps to ensure all workplaces are continuously clean and hygienic. We're urging staff, contractors and clients to engage with regular and thorough hand washing, good respiratory hygiene and social distancing, including providing support for clients by phone or email where possible. All staff are aware of the recommended preventative measures, as well as the actions to be taken if a staff member or client is suspected to have, or is diagnosed with, COVID-19.

Information from official sources is being linked to a COVID-19 intranet page to allow staff to get the most up to date information. This page includes a range of tools and resources to reinforce public messaging and to disseminate to clients.

Local teams continue to promote hygiene and social distancing messages to clients through our team's day to day remote or face to face contact with clients.

## **Service Continuity**

Consistent with Federal and State Government measures to promote social distancing, Mission Australia is transitioning non-essential services to remote service delivery. Our priority is to keep essential services such as homelessness, AOD and mental health residential services, aged care and other essential services open.

Non-essential services will mostly close their doors to the public but will continue to actively support clients remotely. Face to face service delivery may also be provided subject to complying with social distancing and travel restrictions.

Mission Australia staff are being encouraged to think creatively about remote ways that services can continue to be delivered to vulnerable communities. The Mission Australia Service Design team is developing some resources that will help staff with remote service delivery approaches.

Other than residential services, Mission Australia expects most other services will be able to be delivered remotely. Where we begin to encounter difficulties beyond the scope of our plans or due to significant changes in government directives on social distancing, we will engage with your departmental representative to resolve.

## **Workforce**

For high risk services such as aged care, contingent labour contracts have been put in place in the event that specialist nursing and aged care staff are required.

Additional staffing resources are being planned as a contingency in the event of an outbreak resulting in high levels of absenteeism in residential services. An approach to redeploying staff in temporary alternative roles is in development. This will allow staff to remain productive until their service reopens. This means, if a non-essential service temporarily closes, staff from this service that may need to be redirected to support residential and other essential services, subject to matching skills and experience with essential services roles.

Working from home technology, telephony and resources are being provided and upgraded where required to allow staff to deliver essential services effectively from home.

Staff wellbeing is integral to all Mission Australia's crisis management planning, communication and revised approaches to service delivery. In addition to Employee Assistance Program and Chaplaincy support, the CEO and the rest of the leadership team are actively communicating to staff the importance of well-being, healthy eating and exercise to mitigate the impacts of social distancing.

## **Communication**

Mission Australia has been actively promoting hygiene and social distancing through our local services. We are advising clients of changes to service delivery through direct contact with local services.

An active communication strategy is in place to keep staff informed of developments and to provide them with the tools they need to manage new ways of working and a potential outbreak in their service.

These resources include:

- COVID-19 Infection Control Training
- Client Contact – COVID-19 Instructions for Staff
- COVID Notice to Visitors
- WHO posters
- Social Distancing

## Sector engagement

We recognise that we are not alone in responding to this situation so across the jurisdictions, Mission Australia's Regional Leaders, Area Managers and Program Managers are engaging in local service networks. In particular, we have raised the importance of a sector approach to planning for adequate supplies and distribution lines for personal protective equipment in the event of an outbreak at one of our residential services.

A clear sector voice is important in these challenging and changing times. We support the work of organisations such as NTCOSS, NT Shelter, AADANT and the NT Mental Health Coalition to consolidate sector views and issues, and continue close, regular dialogue with the NT government and the relevant Departments to ensure we can minimise the impact of COVID-19 on our community. We are particularly concerned about the potential impact on our older Territorians and our vulnerable indigenous communities who experience higher rates of chronic illness.

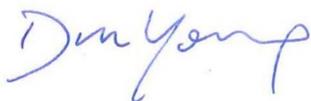
## Summary

The threat of COVID-19 has certainly tested the resilience of our management and staff over the past few weeks, where we have had to quickly act to work in line with government directions, preserve safety of both staff and clients and have advance plans in place to ensure we are prepared for staff and supply reductions, and social distancing restrictions.

To date, whilst we have made necessary adjustments in terms of physical distancing and hygiene measures, overall there has been minimal impact on our service delivery levels. As State Director, I am confident with our responsiveness but will remain diligent to our ongoing risks in this dynamic environment. We will continue to stay in close communication with the Northern Territory Government and our funders over the coming weeks and months.

If you need to contact us at any time, Michael Soler is our Regional Leader based in Darwin and is available on 0490 077 196 or alternatively reach out to myself – contact details are below.

Thanks



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