

Merri Health
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Community Wellbeing COVID-19 project team Update on activities to 11 May 2020

The Community Wellbeing COVID-19 project team was established on 7 April 2020.

This is the second update on key activities undertaken by the team. These updates will be shared regularly.

If you have any queries about this email, please don't hesitate to contact us using the details below.

Community engagement

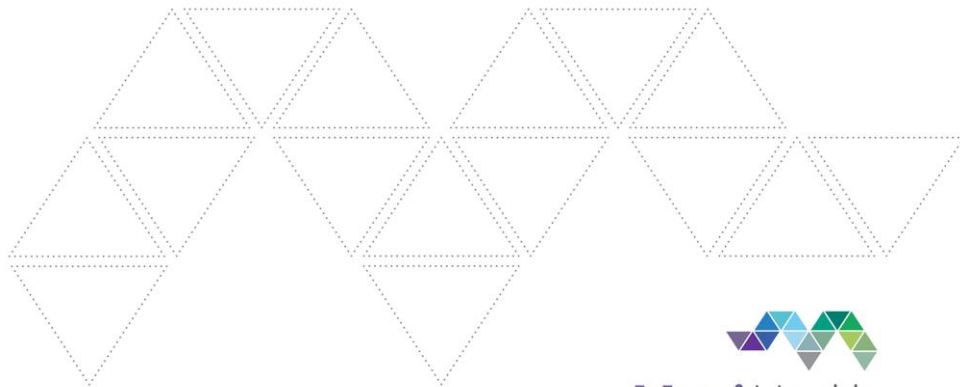
As of 11 May 2020, 22 consultations have occurred with community members. These were held as one-on-one conversations.

Questions asked include the following topics:

- key current concerns
- health and wellbeing
- access to food
- employment
- supporting pre-school and school-aged children
- access to information

The table below outlines key demographic information* for community members engaged so far.

Demographic information	Responses
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person	1
People who speak a language other than English	19
Languages spoken	12 <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Urdu- Punjabi- Gujrati- Saraiki- Balochi- Pashto- Arabic- Turkish- Russian- Chinese- Tamil- Hindi
Cultural backgrounds	6 <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Pakistani (10)- Indian (2)- Australian (2)- Indian Muslim (1)- Lebanese (1)- Russian (1)



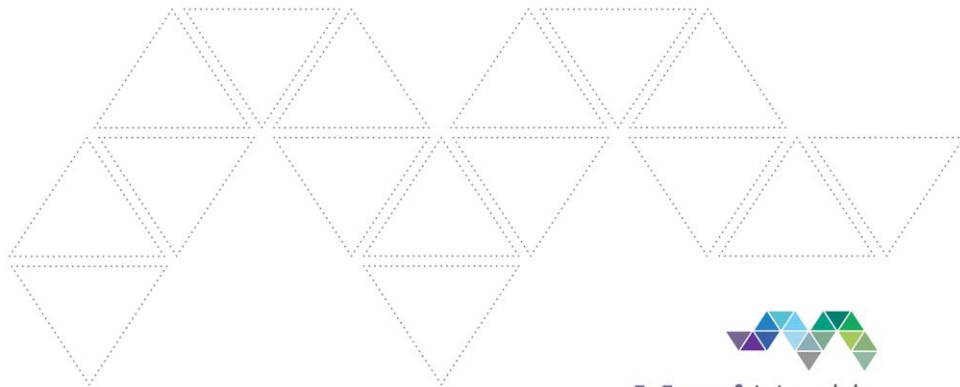
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Demographic information	Responses
Age groups	1 young person aged 6-12 3 young people aged 12-25 18 adults aged 25-65 years
Household composition	Approximately 67% live in households that include pre-school aged children
Lives in	Moreland – 94% Fawkner – 88%
Gender identity	14 female 1 male

**Please note, providing demographic data is optional (some figures will not reflect the full range of participants).*

Key impressions/reflections from these conversations:

- All community members have indicated they have no troubles **accessing food or essentials**, although some reported higher prices for food.
- Most community members reported increased concerns in relation to **mental health**.
 - While some community members expressed concern about their own mental health, others were more concerned about the mental wellbeing of their children and partners.
 - Job losses, loss of income, or changes to work were often mentioned as a cause of increased stress, as well as social isolation and supporting children's learning.
 - Many community members were unaware of mental health supports that are available, especially for children.
- Some community members expressed concern about the inability to see **service providers** face-to-face, feeling that telehealth or online services were not meeting their needs. This includes:
 - GPs
 - maternal and child health
- Community members expressed **fear or concern** about leaving the house, for fear of infection. The recent cluster at Fawkner McDonalds has contributed to this concern.
 - Some individuals have also reported not accessing GP services due to a fear of infection, even where the health concern is serious.
- Many community members highlighted the challenges they were experiencing **keeping children engaged**, both school- and preschool-aged children.
 - Parents and carers expressed interest in receiving more information, opportunities or resources to help engage their children in learning or play.
- Some participants acknowledged the increased toll and workload **experienced by mothers** in households where there are children.
- Most people reported having adequate **access to a computer/device and internet**
 - 1 person reported having no access to a computer
 - 1 person reported accessing a computer through their child's school
 - 5 reported slower internet due to increased use by the whole family



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- Individuals reported using the following platforms to **access information**:
 - News (11 people)
 - Social media (9)
 - TV (7)
 - Internet (4)
 - WhatsApp / Viber (3)
- Community members also had **positive reflections** about their experience so far, with some individuals reporting:
 - they appreciate having more time to connect with their family
 - they are spending more time connecting to their faith
 - they have used this time to rejuvenate and reflect
- So far, **3 young people** aged between 6-15 years have been engaged in conversations:
 - all reported some challenges adjusting to learning from home
 - some felt positively about getting to spend more time with family, while others also acknowledged increase stress in the household
 - all said they miss their friends, and in some cases their teachers
 - one young person acknowledged a greater appreciation for the work their parents had to do (particularly their mother)
 - one person reported enjoying spending time on creative activities

Depending on the conversation, the Merri Health team has provided additional information to community members about relevant services.

The team has experienced significant challenges engaging directly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members due to a range of factors. This experience is shared by other workers within Aboriginal networks in the northern metro region (see further information below).

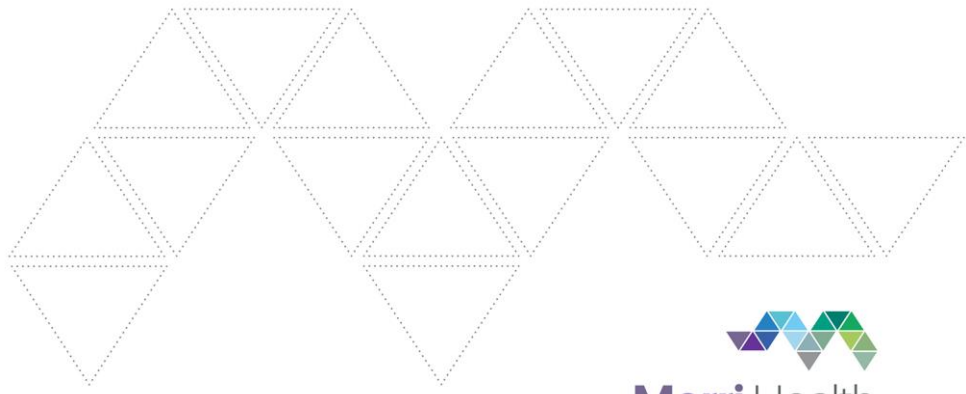
Stakeholder engagement

To date, the Community Wellbeing team has engaged with more than 70 stakeholder representatives in relation to COVID-19.

This includes participation in 24 partnership, network or working group meetings, and a further 16 consultations held with individual stakeholder representatives.

Key impressions/reflections so far:

- Most organisations are doing their best to shift services online or to telehealth. Some services are reporting increased engagement in online programs. For example, MerriKids – an early intervention program for children with additional needs – has seen a higher average attendance rate at group programs. Possible reasons might include:
 - families have more time / capacity whilst at home
 - parents and carers are keen for opportunities/resources that engage their children
 - online formats may be more accessible for families who are short on time
- Reception staff at Councils and other services are reporting an increase in people calling – or staying on the phone for longer – for a chat.



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- Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, and other stakeholders that work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities continue to report experiencing challenges engaging directly with community members, even those within their existing networks. Some possible reasons:
 - community members have other priorities right now
 - there might be barriers to engaging online – including access to devices, wifi and/or data; confidence to use computers or online technologies
- Local kindergarten and childcare services report:
 - Significantly reduced attendance by children (approx. 15-20% of the usual number of attendees)
 - increased distress amongst staff who are required to work, with employees expressing concern about the risk of infection
- Organisations report significant concerns for the mental wellbeing of young people, whose experiences are compounded by social isolation, job losses and disruptions to education.

Communications

Between 6-8 social media posts are provided to the Merri Health communications team per week.

Information focuses on:

- reliable, accessible information in relation to COVID-19, particularly resources that have been tailored to target communities
- how to stay well at home – physically, socially, emotionally and culturally
- supporting the objectives of existing initiatives, including Ready Set Prep and Hello, Fawkner!

Merri Health also sits on Moreland Council's sub-group for the Be Kind campaign.

Moreland Council has included information about Merri Health's service changes in hard-copy newsletters mailed to suburbs where residents are less likely to have access to the internet.

More information

Please don't hesitate to contact the team if you have any queries about the above information.

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Previous updates

[Update from 27 April 2020](#)