

**Merri Health**  
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## Community Wellbeing COVID-19 project team Update on activities to 23 June 2020

The Community Wellbeing COVID-19 project team was established on 7 April 2020. This is the fifth update on key activities undertaken by the team.

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

### Community engagement

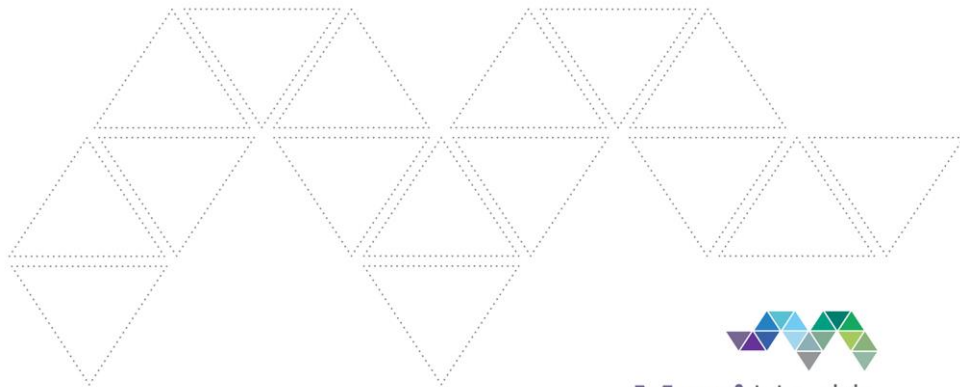
As of 23 June 2020, 62 consultations have occurred with 72 community members. The majority of these were held as one-on-one conversations, with 4 focus groups held with children and young people.

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.

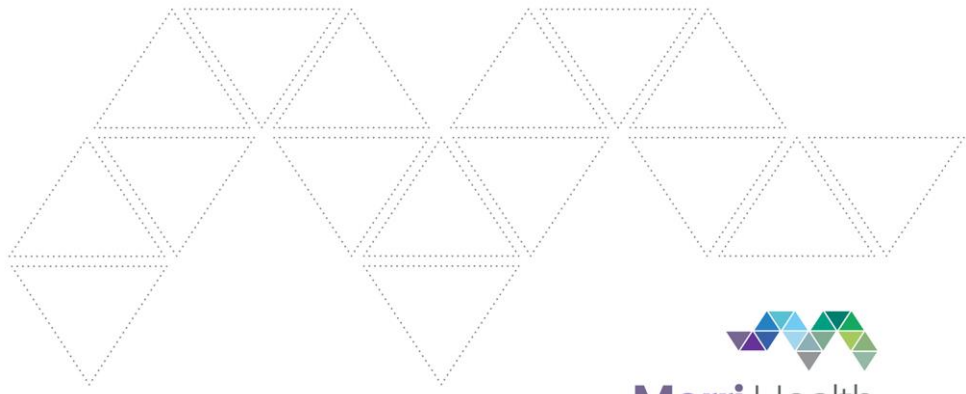
Demographic information	Responses
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person	3, with one person acknowledging they are a descendant of the Stolen Generations
People who speak a language other than English	58
Cultural backgrounds	14 – Pakistani (35) – Indian (9) – Lebanese (6) – Australian (8) – Indian Muslim (2) – Bosnian (1) – Chilean (1) – German (1) – Italian (2) – Irish (1) – Maltese (1) – Russian (1) – Sri Lankan (1) – Sudanese (1)
Languages spoken	21 – Auslan (1) – Arabic (7) – Balochi (1) – Chinese (1) – English (46)



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Demographic information	Responses
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gujrati (1)</li> <li>- Hindi (6)</li> <li>- Hindko (2)</li> <li>- Kannada (1)</li> <li>- Marathi (1)</li> <li>- Pashto (3)</li> <li>- Portuguese (1)</li> <li>- Punjabi (8)</li> <li>- Russian (1)</li> <li>- Saraiki (1)</li> <li>- Sindhi (2)</li> <li>- Singhalese (1)</li> <li>- Spanish (1)</li> <li>- Tamil (2)</li> <li>- Turkish (2)</li> <li>- Urdu (43)</li> </ul>
Age groups	9 young people aged 4-12 13 young people aged 12-25 41 people aged 25-65 years 1 person aged 65+ years
Number of people from households with people aged	0-5 years – 33 6-12 years – 37 12-25 years – 24 25-65 years – 44 65+ years – 4
Lives in	Moreland – 86% <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fawkner (48)</li> <li>- Glenroy (7)</li> <li>- Brunswick (3)</li> <li>- Coburg (1)</li> <li>- Brunswick West (2)</li> <li>- Pascoe Vale (1)</li> <li>- Other: Broadmeadows (2), Campbellfield (2), Dallas (1), Mernda (1), Reservoir (1), Strathmore (1), Viewbank (2)</li> </ul>
Gender identity	Non-binary – 1 Non-binary / agender – 1 Lesbian / non-binary – 1 Female – 56 Male – 11
People who identify as LGBTIAQ+	4
Household size	2 people – 6 3 people – 10 4 people – 18 5 people – 29 6 people – 8 7 people – 1 Varies – 1

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



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Each update, we will highlight one story from a community member to help illustrate the diversity of experiences during this period. Please note, real names have not been used.

#### **Zimal, 16, Year 11 student living in Fawkner**

Zimal is the eldest of 3 children. Her VCE studies have been significantly impacted by remote learning and she and her friends are feeling anxious about how this year will impact their options for tertiary study.

Zimal felt as though she didn't make much progress in learning at home. It was difficult to maintain attention during video classes, and she was too tired to get all her work done. As her parent needed to focus on helping her youngest sibling learn, Zimal relied on friends when she needed help. They had frequent video call sessions so that they could study together. Often her studies and exams would be interrupted by her younger siblings needing help with technical issues.

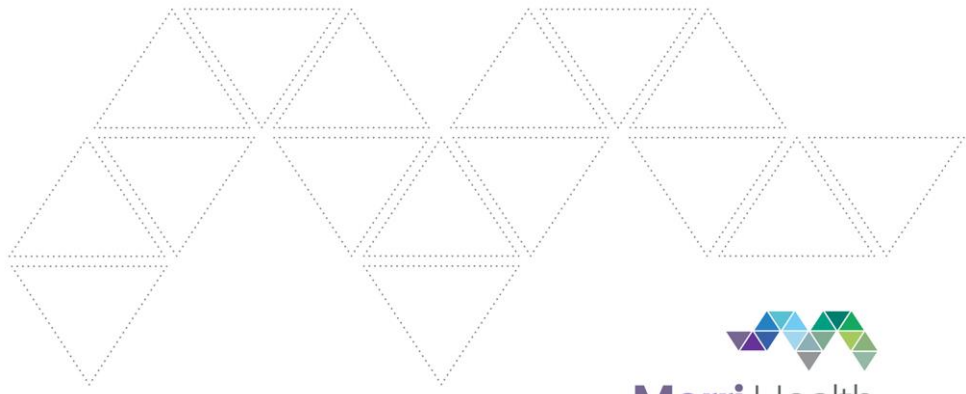
*"It doesn't feel like you have to pay attention."*

Now that school has reopened, Zimal and her friends are relieved to be back, but are also more stressed and anxious. They feel as though they have a lot more work to do now to catch up. Their teachers told them that although their Unit 1 and 2 studies would be marked with more leeway, Units 3 and 4 will be back to regular marking standards. While learning at home she would go for walks and bike rides, but now she has no time for exercise or self-care.

*"I have no time to do my own thing... (I'm) up until 2am studying."*

Below are general impressions/reflections from recent conversations with community members:

- So far, we have spoken with nine young people **aged 4-12 years**
- We have also spoken with 13 young people **aged 12-25 years**:
  - Some young people have reported feeling physically flat, after falling out of their usual exercise routines. The lack of access to gyms and team sports has been a challenge, and some have expressed excitement about gyms reopening.
  - When asked about whether social isolation or restrictions have influenced their mental wellbeing, most young people did not immediately identify this as a concern. However, when asked about whether they have noticed changes in their moods, irritability or feelings of frustration, most indicate they have noticed these in themselves.
  - Most students feel that their learning experience has negatively been impacted by not having face-to-face communication with teachers, particularly when clarifying tasks or concepts that they are struggling to understand.
  - Some young people in years 8-10 have reported enjoying spending more time at home, more so than students in older and younger year levels. They have appreciated being able to do their studies in their own environment and on their own schedule. This is supported by an anecdotal report from a high school representative that this cohort has found studying at home a welcome relief from the social pressures they feel at school.
  - Most students have reported feeling more stressed upon returning to school, as they have to catch up on learning and make up for delayed assessments.
- Some families still have children **learning from home**, with one large K-12 school in Fawkner recommending that parents/carers keep children at home.



- Community members report concerns about changes in their children's behaviour, which they believe is related to social isolation. One parent indicated their child has really struggled to settle back into school, despite having previously transitioning well to prep.
- **Mothers** continue to report feeling overworked, and feeling they have been burdened the most during this time
  - Some mothers report feeling a sense of guilt about ability (or perceived inability) to support their children with home schooling, indicating they have to spend significant time understanding the work before being able to support their child to complete it.
  - Mothers continue to report struggling to keep their children engaged at home.
  - Many mothers also say they have lost or had to give up **employment/income** opportunities during this period, despite a desire to be financially independent.
- Most community members report feeling concerned about a **second wave** of infections.
- Many community members have **cancelled travel plans** to visit family overseas, even in instances where family is sick, frail or needing support.
  - The inability to support family during this time is affecting the mental wellbeing of community members.
- Many community members continue to report **feeling grateful** for the opportunity to talk about their experience.

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

## Communications

Since 7 April, 20 options for social media posts were provided to the Merri Health communications team, with 16 posts shared during this time.

Content included information on young people's mental health and wellbeing, financial services, and employment opportunities in the area. Specific posts were also developed for parents and carers of children aged 0-6 in Moreland's northern suburbs.

Moreland Council continues share key information and service updates from Merri Health via its online and hard-copy channels, and vice versa.

## More information

Please don't hesitate to contact the team if you have any queries about the above information. A report will be prepared over the next few weeks to summarise all activities between 1 April and 30 June.

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