

Merri Health
Healthcare that moves with you

Community Wellbeing COVID-19 project team

Update on activities to 27 April 2020

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

This is the first 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.

From the Community Wellbeing COVID-19 project team
Jillian, Liz, Maddy, Nazish, Jackie and Sarah

Community engagement

As of 27 April 2020, 6 consultations have occurred with community members. These were held as one-on-one conversations.

All of these community members:

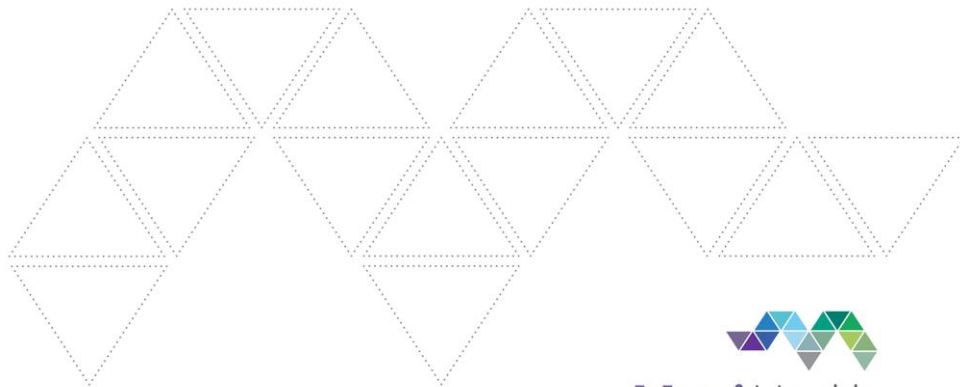
- are from a culturally diverse background
- live in Fawkner
- are in a household that includes children (ages from 0-14 years)

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

Key impressions/reflections from these conversations:

- Most community members felt they were managing OK
- Most community members reported increased concerns in relation to mental health. A range of different factors contributed to these concerns:
 - more people at home, more of the time
 - family members are unable to have 'time out' for self-care
 - increased financial stress due to loss of job, hours or income (eg. small businesses)
 - increased stress while supporting their children's learning from home
 - concerns about their children's mental health, particularly not being able to socialise, see extended family or be as physically active
 - changes in children's behaviours (eg. increased conflict between siblings)
 - fear of leaving the house, due to the risk of infection
 - feeling powerless, particularly due to not knowing when the situation / restrictions might end



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- When asked about mental health services, some community members:
 - were unaware of the supports available
 - were not confident to access services, having not used them before
 - expressed concern about the shame or stigma they felt they may experience from others in the community about the need to use mental health services
- Accessing information – most individuals reported using social media and/or WhatsApp groups for updates
- Community members also had positive reflections about their experience so far, including:
 - some individuals reported an increased connection to their faith through prayer
 - some individuals reported appreciating having more time to connect with their family

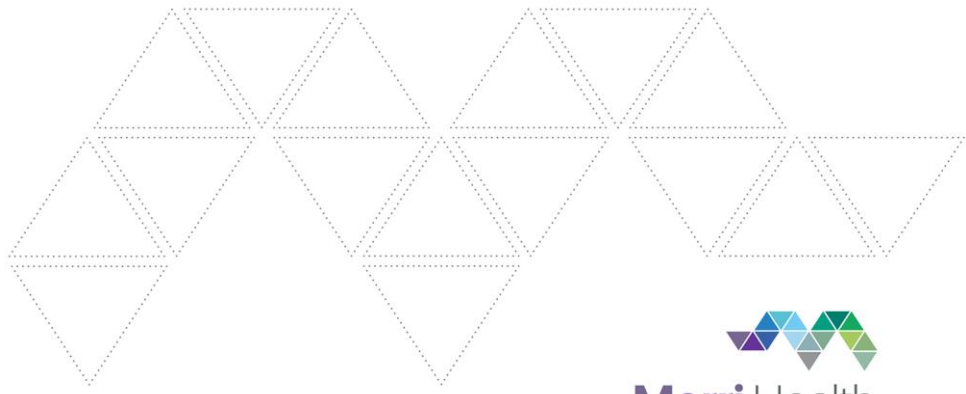
Stakeholder engagement

To date, the Community Wellbeing team has engaged with more than 60 stakeholder representatives in relation to COVID-19.

This includes participation in 15 partnership, network or working group meetings, and a further 3 consultations held with individual stakeholder representatives.

Key impressions/reflections so far:

- Most organisations are doing their best to shift services online or to telehealth. While there are a range of challenges associated with community members having access to appropriate technology, this has also presented some unforeseen opportunities or benefits, including:
 - increased reach beyond traditional geographic boundaries
 - increased visibility of vulnerability (eg. Hume Council's move to appointment-based immunisations has seen increased time for nurses seeing families, which has seen increased referrals to maternal and child health for concerns)
- Stakeholders at the Local Aboriginal Network indicated they've had 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
- Family violence reporting is mixed. Initial feedback suggested lower reporting rates, however, these numbers are now increasing.
- Many services report increased stress or concern experienced by families supporting their children's learning at home, particularly where parents/carers have lower English literacy or confidence in their English skills.
- Two other community health services implementing a new 'check-in' program for community members who have been a client of the service within the last 12-18 months.



Communications

A list of resources has been developed to help support the Merri Health COVID-19 communications plan.

Resources focus 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!

Please send through any additional resources you come across to Maddy:

(madeleine.wald@merrhealth.org.au).

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

More information

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

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