

## Novel coronavirus (COVID-19) sector update

26 March 2020

Colleagues

We would like to extend a huge thank you for all the hard work your organisation is taking to ensure our most vulnerable people are continuing to receive support and services during this challenging time. We appreciate the essential role you are playing in the ongoing safety and wellbeing of your clients.

Thank you also for raising your issues and concerns with us. We are working through these and will provide further information to assist you with planning and response management as it becomes available.

This communique provides information on some of the issues raised to date.

### **Business continuity and contractual obligations**

At the moment, we expect funded services to continue service delivery, with appropriate business continuity planning and safeguards put in place to reduce risks related to COVID-19.

Our regional office and contract managers are working with other Queensland Government agencies to ensure we are prepared for potential impacts to service delivery. We are also developing guidelines and resources for individual service types to ensure consistency across all regions.

We understand you may need to be flexible in your service delivery over the coming months, and you may need to negotiate changes to your contracted obligations as the situation develops.

If your organisation is unable to meet your contracted obligations due to the impacts of COVID-19, **please contact your contract manager in writing promptly**. You will need to advise how service delivery has been affected and what strategies you are implementing to minimise the impact. We will work with you to manage an agreed way forward.

### **Essential and non-essential activities**

All services that promote the safety of children, families and women should be treated as essential. Easily identified essential services include, but are not limited to:

- licenced care services
- services that respond to the safety needs of women and children who are at risk of or experiencing domestic and family violence
- services that support vulnerable families to meet the safety needs of children
- services that interface directly with Child Safety to increase the safety of children in or at risk of coming to the attention of child protection system.

Non-essential services would include:

- convening events
- attending events
- face-to-face group training
- large meetings or group-based interventions where social distancing cannot be assured.

Your organisation should adopt an approach that allows you to continue service delivery as much as possible, while also keeping clients and staff safe from risks related to COVID-19. When providing services in which you interact with clients face-to-face, please follow [Queensland Health directions](#) regarding maintaining social distance, proper hygiene, and not working if feeling unwell.

Client-related travel and home visits are not automatically considered non-essential, particularly where they are directly related to ensuring the safety of women and children. Please limit travel to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and ensure you comply with local protocols and additional lockdown requirements that may be in place.

### **Protecting vulnerable people**

Queensland Health identifies the following groups of people as at higher risk of serious infection:

- people with compromised immune systems (e.g. people who have cancer) or chronic medical conditions
- elderly people
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (as they have higher rates of chronic illness)
- people in group residential settings
- people in detention facilities.

We strongly encourage you to continue to support people who fall within these groups, and take additional measures to help protect their safety and wellbeing. This could include shifting face-to-face visits to phone or video calls, where possible, and continuing to maintain social distancing and good hygiene practices.

You should also support staff who fall into a higher risk group to work remotely or in any other way that minimises risk of exposure, such as restricting access to physical premises, reducing group activities, and exploring alternatives to public transport.

### **Available support**

The following are sources of up-to-date, accurate and reliable information:

- [Queensland Health](#) for all the latest information on COVID-19 in Queensland.
- [Department of Education](#) for school updates and resources.
- [Australian Government Department of Health](#) for the latest information and fact sheets for the public, health professionals, industry, parents, schools and universities.
- [Australian Government novel coronavirus resources](#), including fact sheets, and guidelines for the general public, health professionals and industry about novel coronavirus.
- [Smartraveller](#) for the latest information and advice for safe travel overseas.
- [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) for broader-scale monitoring and protocols for public health events.

In the meantime, please continue to look after yourself, your family and your colleagues.