

SETSCoP

Communique: VIC COVID-19 Response Meeting

Videoconference – 26 August 2021

On 26 August 2021, SETSCoP members from Victoria attended a VIC-specific COVID-19 Response meeting to discuss tools and resources to support clients throughout outbreaks and lockdowns and to identify emerging issues and areas of need for additional support.

COVID-19 Vaccines

Attendees noted a shift in the attitudes of community leaders in relation to the COVID-19 vaccine. Community leaders have an increased awareness and are reaching out to providers to organise group vaccination sessions for their community. This shift has allowed for in-language advocacy about the COVID-19 vaccine from within the community. Generally, providers found that communities seemed to be warming up to the idea of getting the COVID-19 vaccine.

Providers mentioned they are providing a link between vulnerable clients and vaccine clinics, helping them set up appointments and organise transport. One provider shared how they contacted a Vietnamese GP to organise vaccination bookings for members of the Vietnamese community and used the community bus to organise transport to the appointment.

Additionally, attendees talked about their engagement with health practitioners and other organisations to organise information sessions with bi-cultural workers who translate the information. Some are working with vaccine clinics and other organisations to set up mass vaccination events for certain communities.

Some noted that low interest in the COVID-19 vaccine is not related to hesitancy and can come from challenges around access to COVID-19 vaccine services. Providers are trying to help link health providers with Neighbourhood Houses to deliver vaccination hubs in more remote areas.

Key concerns for clients

Providers shared some of the most common challenges for their clients which include:

- Increased mental health issues due to the lockdowns.
- High levels of stress and trauma associated with heightened conflicts in country of origin. This has been particularly evident in the Burmese and Afghani community.
- Feelings of fatigue and being overwhelmed by the degree of online engagement.
- The spread of misleading information.

While clients understand the restrictions, many feel overwhelmed by the outbreak response and find the lockdown quite challenging.

Many clients are experiencing additional challenges trying to help family members and friends in Afghanistan. Attendees noted the high volume of calls and enquiries they receive about the situation and emphasized the importance of getting concise and clear information out in the community.

Questions to bi-cultural workers beyond scope – hard to answer – changing advice from government around eligibility, etc.

Next meeting

The next meeting will focus on the mental health and wellbeing of clients during COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions.

Shared Resources

- for questions about visa applications and expatriation operations out of Afghanistan: **Department's Global Service Centre** Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm local time)
 - **inside Australia - 131 881**
 - **outside Australia - +61 2 6196 0196**
- [Coronavirus Bendigo Refugee Resource Hub](#) – Bendigo Community Health Services
- [Australia Red Cross](#) - restoring Family Links hotline 1800 875 199 or via email at tracing@redcross.org.au
- [Water well project](#) - free online health information sessions covering various topics, run by doctors