

SETS Community of Practice

Communique: VIC COVID-19 and Best Practice Meeting

Videoconference – 15 November 2021

On 15 November 2021, the SETS Community of Practice (SETSCoP) held a videoconference for CoP members in Victoria to share their best practice and innovative service delivery, along with challenges faced, particularly as COVID-19 restrictions have changed.

Vaccination program roll-out

Attendees noted the positive impact of the state pop-up clinics on improving vaccination rates in the communities. Some areas that had previously been amongst the lowest on levels of vaccination and are now among the highest.

It was noted that the number of resources available in-language is increasing. Attendees further reflected on the positive impact of engaging bicultural/bilingual workers in the regular communication with clients and community leaders, particularly turning around misinformation received from overseas.

Attendees noted that communities are holding events in a safe manner and reinforcing COVIDsafe plans and vaccinations.

Impacts of restrictions easing on settlement services

Providers noted the following developments:

- Some offices are opening to staff now and others are preparing to reopen in the new year. Organisations are allowing clients the option of face-to-face (with bookings required) or online appointments.
- High vaccination rate in many areas have allowed for some face-to-face interactions with clients. Many clients are requesting for group activities to be moved to face-to-face, particularly youth. Staff are keen to start in-person group activities again, although some staff experience anxiety in this regard.
- Providers have found that some clients who were reluctant to engage online are far more engaged in person.

Challenges faced in relation to vaccinations and changes in restrictions

Attendees noted that some clients are hesitant to reengage face to face, despite high vaccination rates. Further, they continue to have some communication challenges when wearing face masks.

Providers continue to encounter issues associated with COVID-19 vaccination certificates, including:

- Some clients are unable to access their MyGov account (e.g., because they have forgotten their login details) and are unable to download their certificate

- Clients with limited English proficiency struggle to use online services. This is a broader problem but poses specific challenges in the context of COVID-19 as they need assistance to download their certificate
- Some clients who are double vaccinated are attending appointments without proof of vaccination because of these challenges
- Some clients did not have their vaccination information recorded properly and have been unable to access their records
- Community leaders are targeted to assist community members with vaccine certificates

Some attendees reported that they are providing one-on-one assistance to clients to assist them to download their vaccination certificate and that this has been well received by clients and very helpful to them. Attendees stressed the need for a very simplified set of instructions on accessing MyGov and then vaccination certificates.

Attendees reported that they continue to receive requests for information on how and where to get vaccinated. They are also receiving more questions about booster doses, especially whether they are necessary and why they are necessary. They also noted that there is some concern about vaccine effectiveness, particularly given case numbers remain high and that people who are double vaccinated can still contract COVID-19.

Service providers noted an increase in demand for their services. This is particularly the case in areas which had not previously been in lockdown and where families had not experienced home schooling before, now requiring high levels of support. Further, some areas are experiencing unprecedented high numbers of COVID-19 cases due to easing of restrictions, and in some regional areas in particular city councils are no longer operating COVID-19 hotlines. This places additional pressure on settlement services providers.

Examples of practical challenges experienced by clients include accessing transport to get tested for those who are close contacts of positive cases (in one instance, a family had to walk 40 mins to get tested) and accessing food for people in quarantine (some clients report being provided with unfamiliar food and often rely on settlement services supplying culturally appropriate food). Clients have also noted issues with access to interpreters (or appropriate interpreters) in COVID-19 clinics.

Constant changes to restrictions and lock downs have made it difficult for settlement service providers to maintain engagement with clients and communities. Many clients are experiencing Zoom fatigue, so service are seeking to find sufficiently big premises or outdoor venues to facilitate group activities, which comes at a cost to the service providers. To undertake outreach at different locations, staff are going to various offices with differing COVID-19 policies, which can be confusing.

Shared resources

Hot culturally appropriate food for those in isolation in Melbourne - <https://www.facebook.com/MelbMuslimahs/>