

SETSCoP

Communique: VIC COVID-19 and Best Practice Meeting

Videoconference – 14 June 2022

On 14 June 2022, 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 through the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

MyAus

Information was shared about MyAus app and the 12 languages currently available with more upcoming. The MyAus app has a user focus, with information in-language which summarises in more simple language important topics relevant to settlement. The app brings government information together in one place and encourages clients to self-navigate services. It includes links to some state-based services in some topics, such as SETS providers and mental health service providers.

Information categories covered include:

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|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| - Housing | - Media |
| - Finance and money | - Environment and climate |
| - Centrelink and government support | - Sports |
| - Legal system and Government | - Study and education |
| - Relationships and Family | - Health and wellbeing |
| - Migration and Citizenship | - COVID-19 |
| - Staying safe | - Bringing up children |
| - Pre-departure and arrival | - Working in Australia |
| - Destinations | - Relationships and family |
| - History and culture | - Health system. |
| - Getting around | |

Providers commented that languages, such as Karen, Chin Haka, Chin Zomi and Burmese would be helpful to be added, so that the app could be used by their clients.

COVID-19 Challenges

Some clients are **hesitant to get their booster COVID-19 vaccines**, in particular young adults. This is possibly as there are messages being shared about people facing challenges when they are getting their third vaccine. Service providers are reaching out to young people where they are meeting in community, for example, at soccer matches and answering questions they have about the vaccines. Parents are also hesitant to take their children to get vaccinated. Service providers continue to share with parents in existing group activities through qualified professionals, such as refugee health nurses.

Clients have reported **struggling to afford RAT tests**, in particular those who work casually or part time, who are not eligible for free RAT tests. Due to the cost, some people have a “don’t test, don’t tell” attitude. If someone is a close contact, they are requested to test five out of the following seven days, which costs a large amount, particularly for clients who are on Centrelink income benefits.

COVID-19 has **dropped out of mainstream media** and this has fuelled the sentiment in the community that it is no longer a big issue. Previously there were regular messages of the numbers of deaths due to COVID-19, this is no longer on the news.

The number of members of the community who have had COVID-19 and have not experienced bad side effects, means that it is now being treated **the same as a common cold**. A number of people who have survived after having COVID-19 feel they are now immune and do not want to be vaccinated.

COVID-19 has spread through many communities due to **overcrowded houses**. Some families are struggling to keep elderly parents isolated and safe, when they are living in a house with family members who are COVID-19 positive.

Many community members have **information fatigue**. When service providers reach out with information on COVID-19 they are less willing to engage.

Other challenges

One of the main challenges that service providers continue to get requests for support on is **housing**. This rising cost of living and higher rental prices means that clients cannot afford rental costs. It is reportedly easier to get work than a house.

Another rising issue of concern to service providers is the **mental health of young people**. In Victoria, repeated, long lock downs have impacted on young people's learning and also physical fitness. Many young people are experiencing anxiety and can't identify what is happening to them. Mental health services have long wait lists and some mental health supports require young people to phone and book in themselves, rather than have the support of their case worker to book, which is a barrier for some people.

For some young people who arrived at the beginning of the pandemic or during lockdowns, they did not attend school on arrival and are now **refusing to attend school**. Some schools provide minimal support to young people, for example, additional support one day a week, with the remainder of the week, young people participating in mainstream classes. School support varies due to the discrepancy in funding received by the schools. During lock downs many parents reported that they could not support their children with their classes and that their children would log onto online classes, turn off the camera and go back to bed.

Some young people who have been in Australia for longer than five years and arrived when they were primary school aged have been **disengaging from school** and participating in anti-social or criminal behaviour. Young people have arrived during the pandemic at early high school age and did not speak any English, if they have not received strong support to learn English are struggling to complete their schooling.

Service providers are delivering some group **information sessions online**, as well as face to face. For those sharing online, some clients are struggling to engage with the online system, unless supported. One example of a successful session was delivered by Life Saving Victoria and AMEP teachers supported their students to log on to the session. A challenge when delivering online sessions is if bilingual support is required for more than one language, as this can make the session much longer.