



NEWS RELEASE

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COVID Commission needs community input to minimise outbreaks

The COVID Commission needs at least two dedicated commissioners to represent people experiencing poverty, in an effort to prevent marginalised communities being overlooked in the national containment effort.

The recommendation is central to a new briefing paper on COVID-19 developed for National Cabinet by the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO) and the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS).

Learning From One Pandemic to Live With Another says Australia should learn from previous success tackling HIV, which demanded profound behavioural change, frank and honest health promotion and a strong partnership between community groups and government to contain the virus, in the absence of a cure or vaccine.

“The current lull in COVID notifications is a wonderful achievement but it has only been possible through enormous effort and sacrifice,” said Darryl O’Donnell, CEO of AFAO. “We need to make the most of this opportunity to retool and properly empower communities in the COVID containment effort.

“Similar to the HIV epidemic, the vulnerable and marginalised have been hit hardest by COVID-19. The elderly, those on low incomes, people with chronic disease and from people from diverse backgrounds can lack voice in the national debate.

“As we quickly learned in the early days of HIV a one size fits all approach does not work. We needed to target specific communities with different messages and approaches.

Cassandra Goldie, CEO of ACOSS, said: “We have a network of community and organisations across the country who are tapped into the needs of their local populations, and who are trusted.

“We need to urgently engage these leaders so that we don’t repeat the mistakes that have already been made with migrant communities and young people who have often been unfairly blamed for infection spikes.”



As well as dedicated COVID Commissioners, the report calls for:

- the immediate establishment of a Community Partnership Group to work closely with the Federal Government. It would comprise community leaders representing vulnerable and marginalised communities tasked with highlighting specific needs and providing rapid feedback to government messaging and policies.
- Formal health promotion and education strategies for specific hard to reach and at-risk populations must be developed in partnership with local communities and driven by data and evidence.
- Targeted funding for community organisations representing key population groups to deliver peer-led health promotion and education to their own communities.

The report also says this community partnership approach must be adopted at a state and territory level and that political leaders should look to engage and use the skills of relevant peaks and representative organisations in shaping health, economic and social policy and responses.

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