



# Australian Council of Social Service

28 March 2020

(Updating letter of 27 March 2020)

## URGENT

The Hon. Senator Anne Ruston  
Minister for Families and Social Services  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Via email: [senator.ruston@aph.gov.au](mailto:senator.ruston@aph.gov.au)

Dear Minister,

### COVID 19 Crisis – Community Services Sector Rescue Package

I write regarding the ongoing COVID19 health and economic crisis, the Australian Government's response, and the urgent steps needed to prevent further job losses, cuts to services and to respond to intense service demands and changing community needs.

We have written to you on 13<sup>th</sup> March, 16<sup>th</sup> March, and 21<sup>st</sup> March setting out urgent action required by the Federal Government to provide the necessary supports to the community services sector. In particular, on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> March 2020, we sent to you the **ACOSS, COSS network and ASU COVID-19 Community Services Sector Rescue Package**, published here [https://www.acoss.org.au/media\\_release/acoss-coss-network-asu-covid-19-community-sector-rescue-package-recommendations/](https://www.acoss.org.au/media_release/acoss-coss-network-asu-covid-19-community-sector-rescue-package-recommendations/).

Thank you for action taken to date including extension of some business related measures and some increased flexibility of government funding contracts.

However, the Federal Government needs to go **much further and act urgently** without further delay, in order to rescue the community services sector, both its workforce and the vital frontline services it provides. Services are being shut down around the country, and jobs are being lost.

We have undertaken **further extensive consultations** this week with our members. Yesterday, Friday 27 March 2020, we briefed your office both verbally and by letter regarding specific measures now needed from the Federal Government to prevent **further job and services losses** and to support the vital frontline community services sector to **respond and adapt to the health and social crisis** unfolding around Australia.



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## Essential Services Designation

It is vital that key social services are urgently designated “essential services” and treated as such by not only the Federal Government but also each jurisdiction. This is critical to ensure that people, particularly the most vulnerable in our community, continue to have access to these services during this crisis, and that the organisations that deliver them are supported to ensure the continuity of their operations and their viability.

It is important to note that it is not just services meeting material needs for example food and housing that are essential services. Essential services including services that are keeping people and families well, safe, connected and able to function independently in the community. These services will become more essential as the crisis continues over many months and can be provided in ways other than face to face. Many of our members are working hard to adapt to the way they provide services in this environment. While the physical doors may close, the vital support they provide needs to continue through other means. Otherwise we will see significant rise in social isolation, mental health issues, stressed and anxious families and individuals.

Essential services need to include, but not be limited to the following:

- services that provide people access to food, money and goods essential for their daily living;
- services that enable people to maintain their health (including their mental health) and prevent and treat disease;
- crisis, supported and residential (ie aged care) accommodation services;
- support services for older people and people with disability that enable them to maintain their critical wellbeing;
- services aimed at the protection of vulnerable populations including (but not limited to) child protection services; and
- non-accommodation crisis services, including (but not limited to) domestic violence services, homelessness services and other services working with people in crisis.

It will be critical that the Federal Government pulls out all stops to ensure the continuity of these services and the viability of the organisations that deliver these services. Other services not in the above categories will need to either:

## Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

It is essential that workers in our sector have access to PPE. Our workforce is working with vulnerable populations (including older people and people with disability, but also in a range of other settings) and needs access to this vital protective equipment to ensure the safety of themselves and the people they are working with. All workers who have physical contact with vulnerable populations should have access to PPE.

In addition, the necessary **Community Services Rescue Package** needed as at today, informed by our members.



## Community Sector Rescue Package as at 28<sup>th</sup> March 2020

1. Extend **all business related measures** to community sector and not for profit organisations. Thank you for those included to date.
2. Create a major **Community Sector Continuity of Service Enabling Fund** to ensure continuity of service delivery, secure jobs, prevent loss of jobs or income, guaranteed paid special leave for all workers, and to enable **ramp up of services for people in need** as well ensure that services can adapt remain viable to assist with the recovery from the pandemic. Many services have **lost donations, volunteers, and other major sources of revenue and personnel**.
3. Urgently respond to the specific asks of **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations**.
4. Urgently provide program level funding to community services that rely **on individual funding arrangements** to stabilise workforce and allow for adaptation e.g. child-care, employment and other services, out of home care, NDIS.
5. Provide **additional funding to housing and homelessness services**, accommodation and residential services to purchase suitable safe housing for people who are living in rooming houses or accommodation, residential or group home services in overcrowded housing or for people who are sleeping rough.
6. Take the following action across **all existing government funded organisations**:
  - a. **Extend all existing funding contracts**, especially those currently ending on 30 June 2020, by at least two years to provide as much stability and risk reduction for existing services.
  - b. Urgently **pay all outstanding late payments**.
  - c. **Bring forward future payments** due this financial year, and **pay all funds** payable under contracts to 30 June 2020 now.
  - d. Commit to restore funding for the **Equal Remuneration Order** implementation.
  - e. Authorise organisations to use government funds as they see fit across all their program and cost centre areas, for at least the next three months, with reporting backwards to account for use.
  - f. Delay or relax reporting obligations;



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- g. Freeze government reform and new tendering processes;
  - h. Unilaterally **suspend KPIs and outcomes** to allow for adaption to new conditions;
  - i. **Remove penalties** for non-compliance with contracts arising from COVID-19 Emergency.
7. Guarantee access to **Personal Protected Equipment** and other essential supplies including Food Supplies to ensure basis needs are met, as set out above.
8. Urgently **designate community services that are “essential services”** as advised above.

We urge you to act quickly on these recommendations. As some of the recommendations require departmental action I have again copied this letter to your department’s Secretary, Kathryn Campbell.

Please do not hesitate to call me to discuss on 0459 400 440.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Cassandra Goldie  
CEO, ACOSS

CC Kathryn Campbell AO CSC, Secretary, Department of Social Services