

Australian Council of Social Service

OPEN LETTER

19 August 2021

The Hon Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister of Australia
PO Box 6022 House of Representatives
Parliament House CANBERRA ACT 2600

Via email: Prime Minister Scott Morrison
Chief Minister Andrew Barr
Premier Gladys Berejiklian
Chief Minister Michael Gunner
Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk
Premier Steven Marshall
Premier Peter Gutwein
Premier Daniel Andrews
Premier Mark McGowan

Dear Prime Minister, Premiers and Chief Ministers,

Urgent measures to support Vaccination Rollout and People most at Risk and in Distress

We write to urge you to take the following actions in order to support the Vaccination Rollout and people who are in serious distress across the country.

Vaccination Rollout

Urgent actions

1. Set Vaccination **Targets** that are specific to **priority population groups** and locations
2. **Immediately publish data** on a weekly basis about vaccination status for both **priority population groups and locations** (at least SA3)
3. **Strengthen and resource partnerships with trusted community leaders and groups** to ensure vaccinations are available and accessible for all

We have welcomed the engagement with the Operation COVID Shield Vaccination Taskforce and its commitment to act on public health advice, in partnership with

the community sector and with transparency of data. We urge governments to continue working with community groups and leaders, and to strengthen and resource these partnerships to ensure that vaccinations are available and accessible for all.

We now urge National Cabinet to develop vaccination targets that are specific to population groups and locations. A focus on a national target risks masking areas or populations where rates are much lower, leaving those groups or places dangerously exposed. Expert advice confirms that there is a serious risk that people often most at risk of the ravages of COVID are also most at risk of not achieving vaccination rates equal to or above the national rate due to multiple barriers or poor access to health services.

In order to support all efforts to secure vaccinations, we also need maximum data transparency both by reference to specific population groups and also across locations. This data needs to be urgently released and updated at least weekly. Community-led vaccination strategies are essential to success. Communities are entitled to understand their rates of vaccinations to inform and support all efforts to accelerate vaccinations. We cannot afford to leave anyone or any place behind, especially groups who are most at risk to COVID.

These proposals are set out in the attached **ACOSS Briefing: Vaccination Targets and Data Transparency** (as well as the earlier ACOSS Briefing: Community Sector **Vaccination Principles**).

People Most at Risk and In Distress

Urgent actions

1. **Extend Disaster Payments** to all people on social security or without other income sources to secure incomes at a minimum of \$600 per week for single people in private rentals
2. **Suspend all job-search mutual obligations** during lockdowns and **for at least a month after lockdowns** are lifted, and **reduce standard mutual obligations** outside lockdown areas (e.g. 10 job searches per month)
3. Provide **eviction moratoriums** and deliver **private rental subsidies** that are paid to tenants, rather than landlords

We urge National Cabinet to respond to the extreme needs and distress amongst people on low and insecure incomes. People in private rentals have faced rising rental and housing costs, as well as the multiple financial and emotional costs of extended lockdowns and insecure incomes.

The current income supports are inadequate and have gaping holes that did not exist in the 2020 lockdowns. People on the lowest incomes have no additional

support and have been left in desperate circumstances. These gaping holes need to be urgently addressed. Women and children are particularly at risk. Mental distress is extreme, and there is terrible uncertainty as people move in and out of lockdowns and lose their jobs. Communities around the country are suffering.

We urge National Cabinet to recognise that as at August 2021, people on low and modest incomes are at breaking point. Economic and social supports need to be strong, secure and stable, and at least as comprehensive as in 2020.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on 0459 400 440.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Cassandra Goldie
CEO, ACOSS