



20 March 2020

COVID-19 Communique

Q Shelter has listened to sector concerns and proposed solutions that respond to the need for service continuity and workforce safety in the context of this unprecedented event.

We are working closely with the Department of Housing and Public Works to support their response. We have focussed on providing information and advice based on our engagement with you and also an examination of evidence about how to best meet the needs of service users who are already more vulnerable than the general population.

We provide you with this summary about Q Shelter's understanding of sector concerns and suggested solutions. We are also working with others on guidelines to support appropriate practices for service delivery to social housing tenants and homeless people.

Assumptions

Our engagement and advice is guided by these underpinning assumptions:

- That service provision to social housing tenants and homeless people is front-line and essential
- Services that house people and support the sustainment of tenancies are preventative and reduce longer term costs including increased population risks from COVID-19 and increased presentations to health services including hospitals
- Social housing tenants and homeless people are particularly vulnerable because of health issues including mental health, substance use and chronic disease. They are among those population groups most vulnerable to serious illness and death from COVID-19.

Solutions

Q Shelter has collated 12 actions around six focus areas as follows:

- Supply and stimulus
- Workforce capacity and capability
- Congregate Living Environments
- Procurement
- Food Security
- Data.

Supply and stimulus

1. That a funding is identified to augment service delivery enabling higher levels of sustained assistance to vulnerable social housing and homelessness populations. This should be available for a scaled-up workforce and for additional costs associated with cleaning and providing staff and

ABN 214 955 03 790

515 Wickham Terrace (PO Box 214) Spring Hill, Qld 4004

Telephone: 07 3831 5900 | info@qshelter.asn.au | www.qshelter.asn.au





clients with products that assist with infection control. Flexible brokerage and funding for head-leasing or adapting new properties should also be included.

2. That a stimulus package is needed that supports the adaptation of existing buildings, new acquisitions and new builds that help to address the housing impacts of COVID-19. This supply strategy needs to respond to people currently in housing stress or who are homeless, or who experience housing stress related to the unfolding impacts of COVID-19. This could build-on and accelerate arrangements under Partnering for Growth supporting increased supply through community housing providers.
3. That alternative properties including buildings and houses are identified to accommodate people who are homeless or living in congregate living environments who need to isolate or be relocated.
4. That measures to ensure sustainable tenancies in the private rental market are facilitated by central government. This needs to prevent homelessness from increasing and prevent evictions and mortgage defaults while COVID-19 is still a population risk.

Workforce capacity and capability

5. That a platform is launched to identify and facilitate access to a temporary workforce for potential redeployment to housing and homelessness services. This needs to include a priority workforce that can be mobilised and deployed to sustain supervised housing options for young people and children.
6. That a basic level of infection control training is provided to the housing and homelessness sector and to volunteers to enable employers to deploy a workforce with higher capabilities responsive to the current context.

That an induction training product is developed quickly to support a redeployed workforce to take up roles within the housing and homelessness sector.

7. Additional detailed guidance for service delivery is needed for the broader housing and homelessness sector in the context of a pandemic. This needs to be in the form of clear guidelines based on evidence.
8. That a central information platform is endorsed where organisations can provide regular updates on service provision without relying excessively on emails from individual services every time something changes.

Congregate living environments

9. That a separate strategy is urgently actioned responding to the needs of people in congregate living environments and people who are homelessness. This needs to include detailed guidance

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for providers of congregate living environments in how to achieve business continuity and reduce risks to residents and staff.

Procurement

10. That a central government procurement strategy is launched to secure products needed by the sector to ensure business continuity including sanitiser, disinfectant, personal hygiene packs for workers and vulnerable people and other related items.

Food security

11. That a food security strategy is developed and actioned in the context that food outlets typically available to homeless people and social housing tenants are withdrawing from or reducing service delivery. This could involve privately run food outlets and restaurants otherwise negatively impacted by reduced patronage.

Data

12. That data is collected from people diagnosed with COVID-19 about their income source and housing status to monitor incidence of disease and death among homeless people and people in social housing.

Contact and future engagement

The Deck

Q Shelter now has a section on The Deck devoted to capturing tools, resources and information that the sector might benefit from. Visit The Deck at <https://thedeck.org.au/update/>

Weekly teleconference

Q Shelter is also standing up weekly teleconferences with the sector to share challenges and exchange solutions. The teleconference can accommodate 100 people calling in and the details are:

Every Tuesday at 4.00pm-4.30pm

Dial: 02 8015 2088

Room Code: 268 139 3320#

Contact Q Shelter

You can contact Q Shelter on 3831 5900 or at solutions@qshelter.asn.au to raise new concerns and even more importantly exchange ideas on solutions.

