

Communique to the Homelessness and Housing sector - COVID-19

Housing and Homelessness COVID-19 Immediate Response Fund

Supporting Queenslanders in housing need

The Queensland Government is focussed on keeping all Queenslanders healthy and safe in our response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes supporting our state's most vulnerable and providing the funding, structure and support required for our services sector to respond.

To support this, we have established an Immediate Response Fund of \$24.7M to deliver enhanced housing and homelessness services.

This funding package enhances the work we are already doing to respond to the housing, homelessness and support needs of vulnerable people during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Brokerage funds for crisis accommodation and essential services

To support people in urgent housing need, an additional \$5 million in brokerage funding will be available for specialist homelessness services to provide crisis accommodation and other essential services.

This will allow specialist homelessness services to provide additional services including motel or hotel accommodation for individuals and families impacted by COVID-19 who need to self-isolate or otherwise need temporary accommodation.

These additional services will support vulnerable people including women and children experiencing domestic and family violence, young people, people with a disability, older people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This funding will be available to Specialist Homelessness Service providers, via a 'draw down as needed' fund when providers have expended their current brokerage funding allocations.

Enhanced outreach support to people sleeping rough

The department will also allocate \$1.2 million to enhance outreach services to people sleeping rough across the state, to encourage their continued engagement with the service system and the support they need to take steps into housing.

Funding will be utilised throughout the State, including through the existing integrated service response initiative in Cairns, Townsville, Mackay, Moreton Bay, Sunshine Coast, Brisbane, Redlands, Logan and the Gold Coast, which connects the department with local service providers to identify people in housing need - particularly those sleeping rough - and to support their often complex needs.

Industry fund to support specialist homelessness services and community housing providers who require casual replacement staff

A \$1 million industry fund will be established to support frontline housing and homelessness service providers to access and pay for casual replacement staff, where staff are unable to come to work such as if they are required to self-isolate.

The safety and wellbeing of sector staff is a priority.

This fund will support front line housing and homelessness service providers to continue to respond to the needs of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and adapt their service or staffing models to reduce risks associated with COVID-19 for both staff and clients.



This will be available via a 'drawdown as needed' fund when providers have exhausted other staffing options in their business continuity plans, such as shared staffing with partner organisations.

Funding for cleaning of specialist homelessness services and crisis accommodation properties, cleaning equipment and personal protective equipment

Up to \$2 million will be made available to provide deep cleaning of specialist homelessness services or , Crisis Accommodation Program properties and for funded organisations to purchase cleaning equipment and personal protective equipment. Should a provider call SSQ or a QBuild call centre to advise that an outbreak has occurred in one of their properties, QBuild will arrange for cleaning of the property. This will be funded through the current maintenance program which already provides responsive maintenance to the properties.

The department will also seek to assist other private boarding house accommodation providers, should they have difficulty in obtaining cleaning services.

Accommodation assistance for vulnerable people requiring self-isolation

Further to the additional brokerage funds for SHS, an additional \$5 million will be made available to assist vulnerable people who have been identified as needing to self-isolate to access motel or similar accommodation.

Referrals and provision of accommodation will occur through Local Disaster Management Groups (which include Department of Housing and Public Works staff) and this increase to the department's existing Regional Discretionary Fund.

Fast tracking the next Dignity First Fund round – COVID 19 responses

The \$2.5 million Dignity First Funding Round 5 will be fast tracked and focussed on assisting vulnerable people during COVID 19. Dignity First Fund service providers and specialist homelessness services are uniquely placed to support place-based and person-centred responses dealing with the impacts of COVID-19.

The department will rapidly allocate funding to organisations that can deliver services to assist people and respond to their needs such as access to showers, opportunities to wash clothes and access food.

The department is also working with a number of providers to re-focus \$1 million worth of initiatives funded through the recent Dignity First Round 4 to respond to COVID 19.

Enhancing the Home Assist Secure program

Older Queenslanders and people of any age with a disability may require an extra helping hand to safely remain in their homes, self-isolate and continue to access the essential services they need to remain safe and healthy during this time.

\$5 million worth of existing Home Assist Secure (HAS) funding will be retargeted for HAS services to reach out to previous and current clients, and proactively expand their current service offerings for older Queenslanders and people of any age with a disability. This will allow clients to remain in their homes and practice social distancing or self-isolation, with HAS services undertaking tasks such as deliveries of groceries ('knock and drop' where required), medications and other wellbeing materials. HAS services will also offer regular welfare checks and referrals to community services and continue to deliver existing home security and minor modification services.

Discretionary approvals of bond loans, bond loan plus and rental grants to deal with COVID 19 hardship for people not ordinarily eligible

\$2 million of bond loans, bond loan plus and rental grants could be provided to support up to 1,500 people impacted by COVID-19 and who have lost their income. The department will use discretion in approving these products for people not ordinarily eligible.

This initiative will support people to maintain their existing rental homes or access the private rental market if they experience hardship during this time.

For more information

About funding

- Funded service providers should direct any questions in relation to the allocation and expenditure of these funds to their usual Contract Manager in the department.
- If your organisation identifies any anticipated issues or risks in ensuring continuity of service, please notify the department immediately.

About assistance to your clients

- Should you have any people presenting who require **assistance**, please contact the Community Recovery Hotline on 1800 173 349 or online at www.qld.gov.au/community/disasters-emergencies/queensland-disasters/novel-coronavirus-covid-19.
- If you become aware of a staff member or client with a **confirmed case** of COVID-19, please follow Queensland Health advice available at health.qld.gov.au/coronavirus or call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84).
- Please remember to check the Queensland Health website frequently for **accurate information** about the COVID 19 virus in Queensland and what you can do to prevent transmission and minimise service impacts. We encourage your organisations to regularly disseminate this information to your staff and clients.

About Australian Government directions

Check the Australian Government's website - <https://www.australia.gov.au/> - for the latest COVID-19 news, updates and advice from Australian Government agencies.

Thank you again for your ongoing support and efforts as we work together to respond to COVID-19 in Queensland

The safety and wellbeing of sector staff, clients, and the wider community is our highest priority.

The department recognises that the COVID-19 situation is emerging and evolving rapidly. Officers have been looking at systems, operations and business continuity plans to ensure we can continue to meet the needs of our customers and maintain business as usual with the outbreak of COVID-19 here in Queensland.

Service continuity is vital, and we will work together as a broad sector, to meet any challenges.

The department encourages all Queenslanders to follow the direction of Queensland Health when considering which steps to take to protect their health and safety.
