

Sector Support Consultation Feedback

Introduction

On the 30th April 2020, an online Zoom consultation was held with aged care service providers located within the Northern Sydney Region.

Forty-one (41) local services providers registered, with thirty (30) service providers participating on the day.

The objective of the consultation was to determine what challenges local services providers are currently facing due to the COVID-19 crisis, what innovative and creative solutions they have introduced (so that these could be shared and celebrated), and any feedback or questions that they have for the Department (this will be forwarded to the Department for a response).

Discussions occurred in teams of three within breakout rooms, and discussion points documented.

Below is a summary of the discussion notes submitted from each of the groups.

Challenges Currently Being Faced by the Sector

- **Organising Rapid Respite**
- **Cancellation of Services:** resistance of carers and customers refusing service due to fear of contact
- **Managing and Supporting Isolated and Stressed Staff**
- **Managing New Technology:** ensuring that staff have appropriate technology and skills to use it
- **No New Service Referrals:** slowing down of referral coming in
- **Prioritising, Identifying and Managing Client, Volunteer and Staff Risks**
- **Challenges of Working Remotely**
- **Clients Do Not Have Technology or necessary IT Skills to use technology**
- **Families Wanting Staff to Wear PPE at All Times**
- **Ensuring all Staff Have Appropriate PPE**
- **Clients living with dementia may have difficulty understanding what is going on**
- **Brokerage Services Pulling Out**
- **Running Social Support Groups Remotely**
- **Trying to roll out a new program with all stakeholders now working remotely.**
- **Additional Service & Organisational Costs:** associated with PPE, staff training, welfare calls to customers
- **Staff Adapting as a Remote Workforce**
- **Staff Refusing to Work Due to Fear**

- **Significant Challenge of Escalating Costs**

- PPE costs have risen dramatically; usage has also risen dramatically. Supply has been difficult and nothing available from the Govt Stockpile.
- Increased cost of education for community support workers
- Increased cost of increased communication with customers and staff
- Increased costs due to increased staff supervision
- Increased costs due to COVID -19 monitoring – both of customers and staff

Creative Innovative Solutions Being Utilised

- **Activity Packs:** Commenced delivery of Activity Packs to their social support clients in their homes. Packs contain iPads, iPods, knitting tools, crosswords, art sheets/pencils, word searches, music DVD's, CD's, documentary's and jigsaw puzzles. DVD players and iPad are also delivered to carers on loan. Phone support to carers and clients is offered weekly and feedback of the contents of the Activity Packs is always encouraged.
- **Home Exercise Program:** developed in conjunction with physiotherapist to support clients physical needs. CD and Physiotherapy booklet with instructions and illustrations is part of this program and has been issued to both social support group and allied health clients.
- **Increased Client and Volunteer Communication**
 - Education and training for volunteers
 - New volunteers want to assist – Lifeline reconnection
 - More aware of clients – get in touch with family and their requirements, identifying clients at risk & identifying their immediate needs
 - Acted straight away – immediate connection
 - Volunteers contact the clients and check up on them, do a wellbeing check-in, as many live alone
- **Creative Workforce Utilisation:** since our volunteers have been suspended, we are using staff and library services to deliver meal to customers. Food is dropped off at door and a verbal wellness check undertake. For dementia clients, staff enter the home and place meal on table, encouraging customer to eat. We also distribute toilet paper and Glen 20 to clients.
- **Customer Zoom Exercise/Art Programs etc**
- **Assisting Customers with Obtaining Supplies:** contacting suppliers of masks etc on behalf of clients
- **Increased Staff Training:** offering on-line learning and paying staff for the training time
- **Providing Staff PPE Items and Training**
- **Pandemic Plan for DVA Clients**
- **Increased Customer Contact: via newsletters, phone, Zoom, email etc**
- **Introduction of Client Debit Card:** assists staff to undertake customer shopping without cash

- **Client Education Re PPE and Masks**
- **Pen Pal Project**
- **Customer & Staff COVID-19 screening tools via the rostering app on each workers' phone that links immediately to the office**
- **Advocacy and referrals:** forming partnerships with local services
- **Adapting a flexible service model:** offering clients weekly social phone calls - Food Packages containing fresh and non-perishable food - Care Packages containing tea, books, journals & magazines, chocolate, DVD's, toiletries & specific client requests - Shop by List -and Shop online services.

Feedback to the Department & Responses Received

- **CHSP DEX Report:** report doesn't match service provision changes recently made by Government. How would the Dept like Service Providers to respond.

Providers have to report in DEX of activities provided to clients as usual (i.e. actual service delivery should be reported on DEX). However, due to suspension of Social Support Group activity, providers can still report in DEX against Social Support Individual. Otherwise all DEX reporting requirements remain as usual (see FAQ – V6) changes are made in different colour to identify recent updates by the Department of Health, Policy Section).

- **Return to Work Recovery Process:** request details on process to return safely to service provision, including running of social support groups in relation to workforce (both staff and volunteers) and group members

See FAQ- VS 6). The short answer is NO. Group activities should remain suspended until notification is received from the Department of Health.

- **Uncertainty Re Flu Vaccination & CV-19 App:** are vaccinations and downloading of the App mandatory or voluntary requirement for both in-home staff and customers?

CV-APP is voluntary. While not compulsory, CHSP and HCP workers and volunteers are strongly encouraged to receive the influenza vaccine.

- **CV-19 Testing of Workers:** families wanting all staff to be tested regardless of symptoms, need Department to educate consumers and community as a whole. How can staff respond to this?

Department of Health website has information on workers being tested especially staff of Residential care facilities and staff that are entering client's residences or in close contact with a client.

- **Telehealth & Phone Pharmacy:** will these valuable services continue to receive funding once CV-19 is over?

Not sure, this is a response due CoVid-19. Further policy announcements will be made in due course, based on Government decisions.

- DOH announced \$600 per quarter for two quarters for full-time workers who provide Home Care Packages . This will be paid directly to providers to be pay their staff. The first payment will be paid to providers in June 2020 for the preceding quarter. **How is this calculated? How does the Dept know how many 'staff' each organisation has?**

Section 39 addresses partially, but not your query. This relates to home care packages and residential care rather than CHSP. Suggest contact the Department of Health.

Conclusion

Service providers have been faced with a number of challenges due to COVID-19, including reduction in client numbers, adapting to working remotely and experiencing higher delivery expenses due to increased costs associated with high demand and lack of access to PPE in order to deliver services safely. In addition, although many had crisis and business continuity plans in place, the sector also expressed levels of uncertainty in the Department's expectations in acquitting and reporting against DEX.

Although faced with these challenges, many service providers were able to implement creative solutions.

This is a testament to service providers and their ability to step up and think 'outside the box' to continue to meet both staff and client needs and demands. COVID-19 has forced us to 'think on our feet', providing us with a great opportunity to continue to innovate and utilise new remote technology moving forward.