



Date: 31/03/2020

# HACSU COVID-19

## Members Update: March

We're reaching out to give you an update regarding the COVID-19 virus, what we know as at today and changes we're aware of for HACSU members. From March 16<sup>th</sup> 2020, HACSU officials began working remotely, holding meetings with members and employers via phone or video-call where possible. This decision was made to minimise risk of illness to our officials, as well minimising risk of us contacting with members who are looking after those with disabilities and/ mental health, as well as immunocompromised people and/or people in hospitals where we might normally visit.

- *We are still able to provide all supports to members via phone and email, as our HACSU Assist team are still available and working to serve our members*
- *Our Organisers are still available to speak to you via phone and email, and they can still attend meetings where essential.*
- *Those with individual matters will remain represented by HACSU, including those with cases before the Fair Work Commission (please note that the Fair Work Commission is limiting hearings to phone communication for the time being)*
- *Any physical members meetings must take place outdoors, in an alternative office, keeping in mind social distancing, or at a location that is not a disability group home or hospital.*
- *Any training sessions we had scheduled will be cancelled or postponed for the time being.*

HACSU State Secretary Paul and Assistant State Secretary Kate have been in discussions with key decision-makers and Government officials including the offices of Ministers for Health, Mental Health and Disability and the Victorian Chief Health Officer over the past two weeks.

We've heard members concerns about access to PPE, workplace closures, leave entitlements, shopping for group homes, issues with the NDIS, and other specific workplace issues. We want members to know that we take these issues very seriously and we've provided details to Government officials. We're also working closely with the HSU National office, to ensure that the significant issues you're facing are being addressed at a national level.

Here's an update for members on matters relating to the past two weeks, current practices and changes as of today (31/03/2020):

### General Updates:

- Announced yesterday by the Federal Government, a subsidy of \$1500 will be provided to all employers who have lost 30% revenue to ensure workers can continue to be employed



and paid. At this stage, a formal policy has not been released so we are yet to have full details of this scheme and who it may apply to

- Your safety is paramount; it is never OK for you to be abused at work - if this is happening to you, please contact HACSU immediately on 1300 651 931.
- It has been suggested that you may want to change your clothes once you arrive at work, and then change back once it is time for you to return home, as a further protective measure.
- Currently, no changes should be made through Change Impact Statements, unless the change is almost complete, and it would cause disruption to cease works.
- The only dental work that will be allowed will be urgent dental work – this is also the case for those who reside in disability group homes.
- Over the past weekend, the Federal Government announced increased funding for mental health services to improve access. The majority of this funding will go to phone-based help line services. HACSU members are encouraged to access support where needed during this challenging time; the Government has also advised that a portion of this mental health funding will be focussed on supporting frontline workers.

## Disability:

- Regarding the letter we send to Disability Minister Luke Donnellan on March 20<sup>th</sup>, we have received a brief response last week however we are awaiting a formal response to our high-priority concerns today (March 31<sup>st</sup>).
- We're aware of the issue of access to PPE that has been consistently raised by HACSU members. On March 23<sup>rd</sup>, HSU National Secretary Lloyd Williams raised this issue directly to Attorney General, Christian Porter's Office, particularly relating to the limited supplies of personal protective equipment. Lloyd also raised this concern with Greg Hunt, Federal Minister for Health yesterday. We were advised on March 24<sup>th</sup> by the Victorian Health Minister that 1 million masks had arrived in Victoria at that stage and another million will arrive this week, with more orders to arrive in the coming weeks.
- Sadly, we've heard feedback that disability workers in group homes were experiencing difficulties in getting groceries and essential supplies for houses, as a result of the surge of 'hoard buying' across the State. Supermarkets have now provided special shopping hours as well as access to online shopping; if you don't yet have access please speak with your employer. We have also asked the Government to consider providing each house with a letter or card to demonstrate to Supermarkets that the limits on some products do not apply to those providing goods to a disability house.
- Aruma has cancelled group activities; day programs and community hubs will remain open for the week to assist clients to seek alternative options, as well as to and to plan for redeploying workers to group homes and other work; Respite facilities have also ceased completely.
- Scope have planned the closure of day services and redeployment for workers to residential disability services, in response to concerns raised by HACSU members working at Scope. We have advised Scope that if we are unable to get information from them



directly, we will be seeking assistance from the Disability Minister to ensure we can provide clarity to HACSU members.

- Last week we were advised that workers at Farm Vigano may have been exposed to two workers who are currently being tested for COVID-19. We are awaiting a response from Farm Vigano officials and have provided our concerns to the HSU National Office who have voiced these concerns to Federal Health Minister Greg Hunt

#### Mental Health:

- We have also asked that safety protocols be strengthened for CAT and other mental health outreach clinicians to ensure that any potential consumers being visited are triaged appropriately, with the inclusion of questions pertaining to risk of exposure to COVID-19.
- Some Lived Experience workers have been stood down due to lack of available work. We are following up this issue. If you are a Lived Experience worker and your workplace have made changes to your employment due to this virus, please contact HACSU Assist.
- The Centre for Mental Health Learning is providing online training, with more training sessions being rolled out in future online, some of which are free.
- St John of God Health Care that they will be scaling back non-urgent health services, to ensure there is sufficient capacity to manage emergency health care.
- Safety concerns were raised at Forensicare over the past weekend by HACSU members. We have written to the Forensicare CEO raising these concerns to ensure they will be addressed as soon as possible. We'll provide further updates to members when we have more information to share.
- Barwon Health have advised, they will be collapsing community teams to manage likelihood of risk of infection spreading.

#### COVID-19 Testing:

- As a healthcare or disability worker, the Minister has advised that you are the highest priority for testing and the criteria for testing is less strict; you can also be tested if you are exhibiting ANY ONE symptom (respiratory illness or fever).
- Similarly, any person who identifies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and any person who is currently an inpatient in a hospital who has developed symptoms since being in hospital can be tested.

#### COVID-19 Leave Provisions:

- If you believe you have had contact with COVID-19, you should self-isolate to protect others in the community; you should also be tested as soon as possible if you meet the above criteria.
- While you are awaiting your test result, you can access special leave. Please speak to your employer about accessing this leave. If you have any issues please call HACSU immediately.
- If your test returns a positive result OR you are unwell, you will need to access sick leave ; please keep in contact with your employer and advise them of your result as soon as possible.



#### Visitors of residents/consumers:

- Hospital inpatients and group home residents are allowed one visit per day for two hours , with no more than two people.
- There are to be no more than two people with a patient/consumer/client/resident in the room at any given time at all HACSU members' workplaces, including visitors who are to be reminded of social distancing (2 metres).

#### First Aid & CPR for Disability Workers:

- All First Aid and CPR training is currently on hold.
- If your certification expired in 2020, until further notice, you will be allowed to continue to work in light of these exceptional circumstances.
- For new disability support workers, you must only work on shift with another worker who holds a certification, whether their certification be current or expired.

#### New Provisions in Hospitals:

- There will be checkpoints set up at hospital entries checking temperatures of all visitors, potential patients and workers and you will be asked why you are present at the hospital; simply advise you are a worker at the hospital.
- HACSU Officials have asked for all parking fees to be waived for HACSU members and other workers at hospitals and disability houses, to allow for further social distancing measures; we will await a response from the Minister. We have followed up this request on 31 March with the Ministers of Health, Mental Health and Disability.

#### Helping the Community - Volunteering:

- The Victorian Government has called for health professionals who aren't currently working in the sector, including nurses, allied health and other clinical practitioners to apply to work in services. Our healthcare sector will continue to be stretched over the coming months and workers will burn out. If you'd like to apply to support this workforce during this time of need, please go to: <https://healthworkforceresponse.dhhs.vic.gov.au/>
- Any HACSU member who wants to volunteer their time in either mental health, AOD or disability, where you have prior experience in any of those areas: please contact the HACSU Office, even if your registration or first aid certificate is out of date.
- It is important to be a HACSU member at this time , even if you have lost your job; please call us to discuss your circumstances if you are seeking to resign your HACSU membership as a result of loss of income on 1300 651 931.

#### Ex-DHHS Disability Workers & Delaying ERPs:



- All those workers who have accepted an Early Retirement Package (ERP) will be offered to delay their exit date to 1 August 2020. This includes all workers who have exit dates of April, May, June and July. If this affects you, you will either receive a phone call or letter offering to delay your exit date to 1 August 2020. If you do choose to delay your exit, this will also delay the payment of your ERP in line with the new exit date. Please be aware that you cannot be forced to delay your ERP. Whether or not you choose to stay on, is completely your choice.

In summary, HACSU members voices are being heard by the Government; your concerns are being raised and we are working very hard to manage risks to you and the people you support at work. Please contact us if you have any questions or concerns and continue to check in with our daily updates. We're with you.

We're consistently astonished by the kindness and courage of HACSU members and now in this time of vast need across the country, we're so pleased to see the community spirit shining through within so many HACSU members. We're prouder than ever of the incredible role each and every member plays both as a part of this great union, but also within your individual communities. From HACSU leaders, Paul Healey and Kate Marshall, and the rest of the HACSU team, we want to thank you all for your dedication and bravery. The union is our members.

From Paul and Kate, we want to reiterate that your union is here for you and we encourage you to get in touch with us directly if you're worried. Take care of each other, practice kindness and be courageous; together, we will get through this as a strong collective union.

In unity,

Paul Healey, State Secretary

Kate Marshall, Assistant State Secretary

We are available business hours on 1300 651 931 or via [assist@hacsu.asn.au](mailto:assist@hacsu.asn.au)

Further information:

<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorian-public-coronavirus-disease-covid-19>

<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/translated-resources-coronavirus-disease-covid-19>

<https://www.actu.org.au/coronavirus>