

A toolkit for Looking after your mental health and wellbeing around COVID-19

For many of us, the uncertainty surrounding COVID-19 is the hardest thing to handle. We don't know exactly how we will be impacted or how serious things might get. You may have noticed these anxieties manifesting themselves physically, psychologically and behaviourally. This is a normal response to an abnormal situation.

Do not stress, as there are a number of strategies and services available to support you to manage these anxieties.

This toolkit will provide you with practical tools and information to look after your wellbeing and manage anxiety during this time. What is important is that you take the necessary steps to look after yourself, your loved ones and communities to stop the spread of COVID-19 and reduce the impacts to everyday life.

This is a unique time, where we have the opportunity to be innovative in the way we live and work during these conditions. Small changes to your everyday routine could go a long way.

We all know developing new habits can be challenging. However, this situation gives us all an opportunity to focus on implementing some of our own wellbeing strategies to work more efficiently and improve our wellbeing whilst working from home.

What's important is that you find what works for you!

Why is this important?

- Improves wellbeing and headspace
- Builds confidence
- Improves productivity and focus

Now is the time to be creative in how we check in with ourselves and others. Some activities to try are:

- Acknowledging Country and your purpose in the mornings before work;
- Practice yoga & meditation during your lunch breaks;
- Spend time in nature;
- Learn a new skill;
- Start writing a journal;
- Build a soft play area for the kids;
- Plan a board game night with your family;
- Learn sign language or another language, or
- Organise a virtual coffee date with some friends to start off your week.



What can I do to look after my wellbeing during this time?

Sleep. A good night's sleep could be the difference between a bad day and a great day.

Eat local and eat well. Eating healthy is a simple way to get creative in the kitchen and spend time with your loved ones.

Stay Active. Keep up your physical routine or implement a new one.

Stay connected, Even while physically isolated from your families, friends, work colleagues and Communities.

Stay informed, But don't obsessively check the news. Stick to [World Health Organisation](#) or Australian Government websites.

Focus on what you can control. Don't fret the small stuff,

Plan ahead. Make a plan and prepare accordingly.

Remember, your health is your wealth. Practice safe hand washing and social distancing recommendations.

Self-care. Take time to do the activities you enjoy and that make you feel good.

Help others. Reach out to those in need. Helping others is good soul food.

How do I manage work related anxiety?

Every Victorian will either be in the process of developing their own coping strategy or implementing one. It is important to remember, we are all in this together and what works for one person may not work for you. Some tips to try are:

- Exchange new working habits with your work mates;
- Relay any concerns to your manager and ask for some advice;
- Take at least half an hour a day to check in with yourself;
- Review and adjust your workplan if needed;
- If necessary, plan ahead and take a days annual leave for yourself. This is an emotionally and mentally taxing time. It is okay to take a break!

What support is available from my employer?

VACCHO offers all our employees access to our Employee Assistance Programs partner, Assure Programs. I-CARE deliver culturally appropriate counselling services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples'. Alternatively, Assure Programs have a 24/7 Emergency Counselling Service which is also available to all staff. Assure also deliver Financial Coaching, Wellbeing Coaching, Nutrition/Diet Coaching and Introductory Legal Advice.

[Assure EAP](#), Indigenous Cultural Assist and Response for Employees (I-CARE)— 1800 080 374 (Free call)

What support is available from my local ACCO?

Check online to see if there are any changes to the services your local Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service provides. Remember to call first and speak to one of their team to familiarise yourself with their process and preferred method of seeing patients. Check out our member service webpage to see any updates [here](#).



Are you or your family experiencing hardship due to COVID-19?

Did you know there is support available to you?

- The Victorian Government are offering [Emergency Relief Packages](#) with essential food and personal care items. Each request will be individually assessed based on need and priority will be granted to those most vulnerable and who are in mandatory self-isolation due to COVID-19. These packs will last up to two weeks.
- DHHS Emergency Housing hotline is contactable 24/7 on 1800 825 955 which will direct you to the closest service available to you.
- If you are experiencing family violence call [Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre of Victoria](#) on 1800 015 188 for advice, help and support. There are options for accessing safe housing during isolation.
- [Djirra](#) provides services to Aboriginal women and children in Victoria experiencing family violence.
- [Dardi Munwurro](#) provides 24/7 crisis support to Aboriginal Men experiencing family violence on 1800 435 799.
- If you require urgent legal advice, please contact the [Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service](#) on 1800 648 565 or [Victoria Legal Aid](#) on 1300 793 387.
- Centrelink are offering customers a one off [Economic Support Payment](#) of \$750.00 in response to COVID-19. Check your eligibility [here](#).
- [JobKeeper Payments](#) is available to support employers to continue to pay their employees. Each eligible employee will claim a fortnightly payment of \$1500 for a maximum period of 6 months. Register your interest [here](#).
- The Department of Social Services is offering a temporary [Coronavirus Supplement](#). For more information click [here](#).
- Head to Health is the Australian Government general mental health website which now has a dedicated COVID-19 mental health support page.

Utilities and other amenities

Call your providers to see if they are any changes to your network or plans:

- E.g. Telstra and Optus are offering additional data to customers,
- E.g. ANZ is offering customers an option to pause payments for up to six months, with interest capitalized.

Other online support services:

- [Lifeline Online Chat Service](#) is available from 7:00pm to 12:00am
- Kids Helpline: 1300 55 1800 or [kidshelp-line.com.au](#).
- [Headspace](#) offers a range of online resources including information, online counseling, resources
- [Reach out](#) offers resources to youth and their parents
- [MensLine](#) Australia offers telephone and online counselling services for men with emotional health and relationship concerns.
- [Counselling Online](#) offers 24/7 free drug and alcohol counselling

COVID-19 Assessment Centers in the [Metro Region](#):

- The Austin Hospital
- The Royal Melbourne Hospital
- The Royal Children's Hospital
- The Frankston Hospital—Peninsular Health
- The Sunshine Hospital

The latest medical information is changing on a daily basis.

If you suspect you are at risk, or would simply like to understand COVID-19 more, please visit the Department of Health's website [here](#).

To understand the symptoms, conduct a COVID-19 self-assessment via the DHHS website [here](#).



Practicing mindfulness whilst working from home

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the quality of being present and fully engaged with your feelings. Mindfulness has many benefits, from reduced stress and anxiety to increased focus and happiness. For some of us, mindfulness comes easily. For others, it might take a little longer. Remember that we all have to start somewhere.

What's important, is to give it a go.

Mindfulness exercises:

[Dadirri by Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr—Deep Listening Exercise](#)

One minute exercise:

- For one minute, your task is to focus on your breathing—that's it! Take long and deep breaths with your feet planted on the ground. With practice, you can extend this time to longer to suit you.

Mindful Observation:

- Choose a natural object in your working space and focus on watching it for one minute. It's simple, just relax and only focus on that object. Allow yourself to connect with its energy and purpose. Focus on why that object gives you joy.

Breathing exercises:

- Pay attention to each breath in and out as they follow rhythmically one after the other. This will ground you in the present and help you move into a state of awareness and stillness. Try counting up and down from 5.

What not to do while working from home:

1. Eat all your snacks in one day,
2. Forget to include your pets in the next team meeting.
3. Forget to claim offsets when it comes to doing your tax.
4. Allow your room mates to cameo in their towel during a zoom call.
5. Forget to stretch your legs and get moving.

FAQs

Can I work remotely if I am in self-quarantine?

Yes, you can!

What do I do if I am share housing with someone suspected to have had contact with someone who is ill?

If your housemate has followed all the required steps for self-quarantine, you are not required to self-quarantine. Good news, you only need to act if your house mate becomes a confirmed case. Visit the DHHS information page for more information about COVID-19 [here](#).

Does this change what I can claim on my tax?

Yes it does! You can claim for all utilities and amenities utilised whilst working from home. Check out what you can claim [here](#).

Your cheat sheet to get you through COVID-19 For You

For you:

Resources:

- [Anxiety Resource Centre](#) Vic facilitate online support groups free of charge.
- [eHeadspace](#) provides free online support and counselling to young people between the age of 12 to 25 years.

Activities:

- [DIY Facemask](#)
- [Buzzfeed quizzes](#) including [Which Disney Character are you?](#) And [Which Friends character are you?](#)
- [Secretly healthy recipes found on BigMansWorld](#)
- At Home workouts to try with your family—[CrossFit to Yoga](#)
- Join Facebook Community Groups like The Yarning Circle and One Mob

Other resources:

- Mindfulness Apps: [Headspace](#), [Down Dog](#), [Smiling Mind](#), [Mood mission](#), [Insight Timer](#)
- Other skill building apps to try: [Audible](#), [Forest](#), [Duolingo](#), [Trello](#)
- Playlists & podcasts: [Tiddas for Tiddas Podcast](#), [TEDX Talks](#), [The Joe Rogan Experience](#) podcast, [Blak Australia](#) Playlist
- Good TV: [Black Comedy](#), [Hunt for the Wilderpeople](#), [Our idiot brother](#), [BOY](#), [Goodful](#) YouTube
- Interesting Reads: [Dark Emu by Bruce Pascoe](#), [Betoota Advocate](#), The [Barefoot Investor](#), All the Light We Cannot See by Anthony Doerr and heaps more can be found online at Dymocks [here](#).
- [IndigenousX Good Reads](#)



Your cheat sheet to get you through COVID-19 For Elders

Resources:

- [Quick relaxation techniques](#) by Black Dog Institute
- Spotify has some great meditation playlists

Activities:

- [Guided Meditation videos](#)
- Develop new skills with technology e.g. Facebook, Zoom, Skype
- Scrapbooking and going through old photos
- Develop an exercise routine
- [Exercise routine for Seniors at home workout](#)
- [Vegan Dinner Recipes](#)
- Duolingo App: Learn a new language
- Dancing!
- Try out new ways of doing things i.e. online shopping
- Board games such as Scrabble, Taboo, Rummy
- Read some Audiobooks through a Kindle or Audible
- Spotify has some great meditation playlists

Other resources:

- [Smiling Mind](#) is available to support you to feel connected, inspired and to foster good mental health habits during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Podcast: [Stuff you Missed in History Class](#).
- [Good TV on Netflix](#): Blue Planet, Planet Earth, Grace and Frankie, Idiottest, Chefs Table.

Your cheat sheet To get you through COVID-19 For Kids

Resources:

- [Calm Kid Central](#)—Coping with Challenges with COVID-19 video and web based resources.
- [Headspace for Kids](#) : guided meditations for kids with visuals and music
- Emotions chart—identify emotions to support children articulating how they feel.
- Calm breathing exercises for Kids
- The Calm App—focus on breathing exercise app to practice steady breathing
- Supporting children and young people with worries about COVID-19

Activities:

- [Traditional Aboriginal Games](#) from all over Australia to try at home either indoors or in the backyard
- [At home craft workshops](#) including [DIY Calm Down Glitter Jars](#),
- [DIY I Spy Jars](#) and other DIY activities at [C.R.A.F.T.](#)
- Encourage reading times
- Challenge older children to make dinner. Easy to follow recipes can be found on [Kidspot](#).
- Daily journaling,
- Audiobooks on [Audible](#),
- Make a comic book
- [Forbes, 101+ Ways to Keep Your Kids busy During Coronavirus Closures](#)
- [Access Mars Interactive Journey](#)
- [Virtual Journey – Great Wall of China](#)
- Reconciliation Australia [Narragunnawali Reconciliation in Education](#)
- Audiobook: We're going on a Bear Hunt—need we say more!

Other information and support

- For kids--[The HUGE Bag of Worries](#) by Virginia Ironside and Frank Rodgers
- For parents—[Helping Your Anxious Child: A step by step guide for parents](#) by Ronald M Rapee, Ann Wignal