



VACCHO Media Release

Serious business as confirmed number of COVID-19 cases on the rise in Victorian Aboriginal communities

28 July 2020

Victorians have been urged to get serious about the dangers posed by COVID-19 following a large spike in cases in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities over the weekend.

There are now 45 confirmed COVID-19 cases in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Victoria, up eight on the 37 cases recorded late last week.

Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) CEO Jill Gallagher AO said the latest figures were worrying and called for more funding to flow directly to the ACCOs on the frontlines of providing support.

“New data from the Department of Health and Human Services shows a spike in COVID-19 cases in Melton, Brimbank and Hume local government areas,” Ms Gallagher said.

“Almost two-thirds of cases are female with more than half of cases in the 15-44 age group which shows that young people are not immune from this virus.

“These numbers are extremely serious, particularly as we are starting to see infections in rural areas, and in spikes in some LGAs.”

Ms Gallagher said Communities have done a great job and made a huge effort keeping numbers low up to this point.

She said she understood that people were feeling frustrated by the lock-down measures in metropolitan Melbourne and Mitchell Shire, but Communities needed to get on top of this virus quickly otherwise cases would continue to escalate.

“Thankfully, we are yet to see the unthinkable, like a fatality, or a large amount of cases in hospital ICUs. Or worse, an outbreak in one of our Aged Care Facilities, or Early Year Centres but this is around the corner if we don’t remain vigilant and take every precaution to stay on top of this virus,” Ms Gallagher said.

“If you are showing even the mildest of symptoms such as runny nose, sore throat, coughing, fever, loss of smell or taste, or shortness of breath, you must get tested.

“And our mob cannot go to work if they are sick.

“It’s critical people go home immediately after they have been tested and isolate until they get their test results.”

While Ms Gallagher said the Federal Government funding commitment of \$123 million to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sector to boost its response to COVID-19 was welcomed, she remained concerned that more funding would be required and needed to be directed to Community organisations at the frontline of health services.

Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation Inc.

VACCHO is the peak body for the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal peoples living in Victoria.

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“ACCOs are the organisations most responsible for frontline Aboriginal health protections, however less than 40 per cent of that funding is available to them,” she said.

“Within the \$123 million funding package, \$25 million is specifically directed to remote communities, and \$50 million is specifically for Indigenous businesses, to which ACCOs only have partial access.

“The flow down investment is minimal. Leaving only \$48 million for the ACCO sector across the country, funding that is also available to remote areas.

“We know that nearly 80 per cent of the country’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population live in urban areas.

“These urban areas come with their own unique challenges and costs, including overcrowded dwellings, underlying health conditions and less ability to isolate from the broader population.”

A brief snapshot of the 45 cases in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

- 21 have fully recovered
- 24 remain active
- 20 are in isolation, not admitted to hospital
- Almost two-thirds of cases are women
- We are seeing spikes in Melton, Brimbank and Hume
- More than half of cases are in the 15-44 age group
- A third of cases are in the 45-64 age group

VACCHO is the leading advocate for the health of Aboriginal peoples in Victoria and a peak organisation to its membership of 32 ACCOs. VACCHO also works closely with partner organisations, Government, non-Government community sector organisations across Victoria and nationally.

To check where you can be tested:

- Call your local ACCO or doctor
- Contact one of the testing ACCOs – <http://www.vaccho.org.au/about-us/coronavirus/for-you-at-home/support/safe-testing>
- Go to DHHS website – www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/getting-tested-coronavirus-covid-19
- Call the coronavirus hotline on 1800 675 398
- Call 1800 675 398 (option 8) to register for worker support payments

For media inquiries or interview requests please [contact](#) Andrew Jefferson on 0400 694 593.