



MEDIA RELEASE

HEALTH PRECAUTIONS REMAIN IMPORTANT AFTER PEACEFUL PROTEST

Reminder to self-isolate if you can and get tested if you are feeling unwell.

11 June 2020, Victoria: Australia joined the rest of the world on Saturday 6 June 2020. Thousands participated in a number of #BlackLivesMatter peaceful rally demonstrations in response to the horrific and public killing of George Floyd by Minnesota police officers.

The high participation, even during a pandemic, highlights that race issues, systematic oppression, and police brutality resonate deeply, but especially within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Communities.

Since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, a ten-year inquiry that occurred in the early 90s', Australia continues to see extremely disproportionate numbers of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system. As well as abhorrent cases of mistreatment and loss of life while being detained in police custody.

On Saturday, during rallies, it had been reported a total of 432 Aboriginal deaths in custody had occurred. Sadly, as of Monday 9 June 2020, that number was corrected to 437.

Last week, VACCHO supported a harm minimisation approach to the peaceful protests. We recognised that large crowds were likely to congregate in Melbourne's CBD regardless of any discouragement. We wanted to ensure those deciding to attend, could do this as safely as possible.

Our messaging to those who decided to go to the rally was loud and clear; stay home if unwell or vulnerable, have chronic conditions, or care for anyone who does; be sensible and wear face masks, bring sanitisers and wash your hands; and maintain safe distance of 1.5 meters apart.

Today, Victoria's Chief Health Officer, Brett Sutton, announced that a non-Aboriginal man in his thirties who attended the BLM rally held in Melbourne, has tested positive to COVID-19. Victoria reported another 7 cases overnight. These 7 cases are not linked or traced back to the rally.



Brett Sutton also advised that this man, who wore a mask at the rally, showed no symptoms Saturday. Mr Sutton reaffirmed that he was diagnosed 24 hours following the rally, meaning it was 'highly unlikely' that he caught the virus there. Normally people show symptoms 4-6 days after being exposed to the virus. Currently, 179 of the 1,699 cases of COVID-19 are linked to cases of community transmission in Victoria which are unable to be traced back to a known source.

Consistent with the rally organisers, the Warriors of Aboriginal Resistance (WAR) and the Chief Health Office advice. VACCHO continues to strongly encourage anyone who attended the rally to:

- Self-isolate for 14 days following the rally if you can.
- Avoid seeing Elders or any vulnerable family members during self-isolation periods.
- Get tested if showing even the mildest of symptoms, i.e. a sore throat or runny nose.
- Continue to wash hands regularly and keep a safe distance of 1.5 meters apart.

VACCHO would like to remind anyone who attended the rally and especially our Aboriginal families and Communities to remain vigilant in looking after themselves and each other. We recognise the serious health risks posed with attending the rally, but also how triggering and saddening these events can be. We know health must be considered holistically, and health risks are broader than physical outcomes, and encompass cultural, spiritual, and emotional factors also.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are expected to carry an enormous cultural load in the wake of this global movement. And, now more than ever we need to support each other.

If you are struggling talk with your local Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation and/or have an anonymous yarn, with the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service on 9403 3330. Alternatively, you can contact Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Beyond Blue on 1300 22 4636.

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