

Media Release

For Immediate Release

Friday February 18, 2022

AHCWA Calls for More Partnership and Transparency on WA COVID-19 Response

The Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia has refuted claims by the Department of Health that the Government's WA COVID Care at Home program is accessible to clients in remote locations.

AHCWA Chair Vicki O'Donnell OAM said while the sector had been involved in some of the clinical protocol details of the State Government's opt-in telehealth program, which was launched this January to provide at-home care to patients diagnosed with COVID-19; Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services were never afforded the opportunity to be part of the process as contracted providers of services to fill the inevitable gaps.

"The ACCHS sector has on multiple occasions raised concerns about aspects of the proposed model, and while some have been addressed, a number of serious issues remain," Ms O'Donnell said.

"The State Government's WA COVID Care at Home program does not address concerns raised by the Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia around accessibility barriers for Aboriginal people. While the program will likely be effective for much of the general population; an opt-in phone service delivered by an Eastern States-based third party unfamiliar with Western Australian Aboriginal communities will not meet the needs of many Aboriginal people," she said.

"The Council is concerned this will result in a service gap and additional, unresourced work by the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services sector will be needed to fill it, which, without additional funding from the State Government, will in turn divert resources from other services."

Ms O'Donnell said the program neglected a significant proportion of Western Australians not just in remote and regional locations, but in metropolitan areas as well.

The current program won't notify GPs or Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services of patients who are COVID positive, meaning these health services will not be properly engaged in the care of COVID-19 patients. Many vulnerable patients will need ongoing care for their underlying chronic diseases; and it is important that GPs continue to be involved during this risky time of isolation.

In 2020, when the risk posed by COVID-19 to communities was first realised, decisive and pre-emptive action by Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services was supported by governments and other partners, which ensured Aboriginal communities did not experience the serious health impacts the pandemic has caused elsewhere.

"As we enter this most critical stage of the pandemic, a return to that open, transparent working partnership approach between the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services sector and the WA Government is critical if we are to ensure our communities are safe and that their needs are being met," Ms O'Donnell said.

AHCWA is seeking assurance that sufficient access to phones and data is made available for regional and remote communities, that the program will offer cultural safety training for staff and that Aboriginal Liaison Officers are engaged as promised.



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“AHCWA hopes to partner with the WA Government to fill these identified gaps in the program, just as we’ve worked successfully together with governments since early 2020 to deliver collective, culturally appropriate and localised solutions to the COVID-19 pandemic,” she said.

“Key to ensuring that the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services are able to meet the needs of COVID positive Aboriginal patients is the provision of resourcing to cover the costs of diverting staff to support COVID positive patients, as well as the need for further PPE.”

ENDS

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