

Media release

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NSW PEAK SOCIAL SERVICES GROUPS PUSH FOR MEASURES TO SUPPORT THE MOST VULNERABLE DURING COVID LOCKDOWN

As NSW deals with this latest COVID-19 outbreak, peak social services bodies are urging both State and Federal Governments to ensure measures are in place to support the most vulnerable.

NCOSS, Homelessness NSW and the Tenants Union of NSW have written to Premier Berejiklian and Treasurer Perrottet asking them to advocate for a range of key initiatives with the Federal Government, including:

- Reinstatement of a targeted JobKeeper so that eligible employees in hard-hit industries can remain connected to their employers and able to cover living costs while unable to work.
- Reintroduction of a JobSeeker supplement so that those who were already unemployed or have lost their jobs due to the recent outbreak are able to keep a roof over their heads.

At a state level, the peak bodies have called on the NSW Government implement the following measures:

- Reintroduce the Rent Moratorium to enable waiver or deferral of rental payments and to prevent landlords from evicting tenants due to rent arrears. Consideration should also be given to a housing relief scheme for renters who cannot make rental payments or cover living costs because of COVID.
- Work with community organisations to proactively ensure that homeless people and other vulnerable groups are vaccinated as a priority.
- Ensure that essential workers in the NSW community services sector, regardless of setting, are prioritised and incentivised to get vaccinated, through targeted, appropriate messaging.
- Directly engage with 'trusted sources' to convey public health messages and encourage uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine among CALD communities.

NCOSS CEO Joanna Quilty said the NSW Government was acting swiftly in response to the increasing spread of COVID-19 in Greater Sydney, but more needed to be done.

"We really need to act fast and support those vulnerable groups during this extremely difficult time," Ms Quilty said.

"From income support and rent relief to prioritising the vaccine for those really vulnerable groups, there's a lot that needs to be done by both Federal and State Government."

“The community sector also has a key role to play in supporting both governments in more effectively connecting vulnerable groups to important health information and should be working more closely with our Health and government partners on this.”

Homelessness NSW CEO, Katherine McKernan said it was vitally important that there was contingency for homelessness supports to be extended if the lockdown extends.

“We welcome the NSW Government’s efforts so far to ensure those sleeping rough can get into hotels,” Ms McKernan said.

“We need to ensure there is contingency for this to continue if the lockdown continues, and we need to get these vulnerable people vaccinated as a matter of urgency.

“We also need to prevent homelessness by providing financial support to families and others at risk – stay at home orders can’t be observed if people can’t afford to keep their homes.”

Tenants’ Union of NSW CEO, Leo Patterson Ross said this was an extremely difficult time for people renting and in precarious employment situations.

“People are doing it tough, and we really need to be considering housing relief for renters who cannot make rental payments or cover living costs because of COVID,” he said.

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