



Victoriran Aboriginal Health Service
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MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday 07 July 2020

Extension of *Yarning SafeNStrong* crisis helpline to 24 hours, seven days.

Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) respond to COVID-19 high-rise lockdowns.

On Sunday 5 July 2020, VAHS, VACCA, VACCHO, AHV, Dardi Munwurro, VALS & Djirra met with Victorian Government to plan legal, medical and community care support for Aboriginal families and residents affected in the Melbourne high rise shut down.

The lock down of Flemington, Kensington and North Melbourne sees 1345 units in the nine towers impacted, housing 3000 people, and many Aboriginal families without access to their family and other support services including face to face access to workers from Aboriginal services, leaving many feeling vulnerable and isolated.

In response VAHS have extended the operating hours for *Yarning SafeNStrong* hotline (1800 95 95 63) to operate seven days a week, for 24 hours.

The free and confidential statewide helpline will not only focus on the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal Victorians, but will also act as a emergency response line to provide assistance with health, family violence, housing, and legal services.

VAHS CEO Michael Graham said the *Yarning SafeNStrong* helpline “will now offer critical emergency response services as well as counseling support during this growing crisis” with counsellors available 24 hours to take calls, and connect to support services.

“We’ve seen incredible resilience within our communities during the COVID-19 pandemic, but it’s important that we stay connected and accessible at all times to support our people who are highly vulnerable during this time”, he said.

In addition to providing the Yarning SafeNStrong crisis line, VAHS will play a central coordination role in the Aboriginal Community Controlled Sectors' response to the most recent high rise lockdown, to ensure those affected stay informed, manage outbreaks and provide on the ground legal, medical and community care support for Aboriginal families and residents.

VAHS will work closely with the families impacted assessing and triaging needs across organisations and continue an innovative approach to supporting Aboriginal Communities during COVID-19.

Yarning SafeNStrong counsellors are available by calling 1800 95 95 63.

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About VAHS and Yarning SafeNStrong

Yarning SafeNStrong (YSNS) is a confidential phone crisis line for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and families who need to have a yarn with someone about their wellbeing. COVID-19 has seen many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people without access to their family and other supports, including face to face access to workers from Aboriginal services, leaving many feeling vulnerable and isolated.

There is strong evidence to support the concept of a state-wide Aboriginal counselling service model with strong cohesive links to existing regional and metropolitan Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing support services. Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOS) have the knowledge and expertise about how to engage and respond to the social, cultural and emotional needs of local Aboriginal people, their families and their

communities.

Without culturally safe options designed and implemented by Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal people are at risk of disengaging from service systems and supports, exacerbating disadvantage and poorer outcomes, and leading to increased service demand both now and into the future. Local and international evidence shows us that self-determination is the key policy approach that has produced effective and sustainable outcomes for Aboriginal people and communities.

Call 1800 95 95 63 or visit facebook Yarning Safe'n'Strong