



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE COVID-19 2021 PANDEMIC RESPONSE

Ms Elizabeth Lee MLA (Chair), Ms Suzanne Orr MLA (Deputy Chair), Ms Jo Clay MLA

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the COVID-19 2021 pandemic response

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**SUBMISSION BY THE
TUGGERANONG COMMUNITY COUNCIL INC
TO THE
SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE COVID-19 2021 PANDEMIC RESPONSE, ACT LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

13 NOVEMBER 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input and comment on the ACT Legislative Assembly pandemic response. As a local community-based association, the Tuggeranong Community Council (TCC) represents the interests of the local residents and the communities within the Tuggeranong Valley.

When deliberating on this submission, the final 2020 report Covid-19 pandemic response was considered regarding what we thought was still relevant and what needed to be followed up on. A statement is included from the Tuggeranong Community Council (TCC) on the effects the lockdown had on our operations. Feedback and comments were sought from the TCC Youth Engagement Sub-Committee, and general community comments were also considered and are included.

Responses are grouped under the following headings:

1. 2020 Report feedback where issues are still relevant
2. The Tuggeranong Community Council (TCC) and COVID 19
3. Comments from Tuggeranong Community Council Youth Engagement Sub-committee
4. Comments from TCC Members/Community
5. The Way Forward

1. 2020 REPORT FEEDBACK WHERE ISSUES ARE STILL RELEVANT

In this report there were a number of issues that we felt still needed to be followed up on. They include:

- When easing restrictions (Int Rep 1, Rec 1), appropriate education needs to include outreach steps to those who are vulnerable, isolated, have mental health issues or have no easy access to online services.
- Need to assist community organisations who may still need extra support to help deliver services in response to Covid 19 (Int Rep 1, Rec 11).
- ACT Government should continue to work with the hospitality and the club sector on occupancy arrangements, (Int Rep 1, Rec 12)
- Telehealth services should be made available indefinitely”_(Int Rep 4, Rec 6)

Children and Young People



- Ensure adequate support and information on services, including target marketing, on what is available to help them (Int Rep 2, Rec 7).
- Ensure adequate money is available to students from all school systems who may have been left behind by the changes in education, in particular those who were struggling before the emergency (Int Rep 2, and 11 and Int Rep 4, Rec 21). *(see also TCC Youth Subcommittee comments)*

NOTE: Are there plans for the ACT Government to undertake an independent longitudinal study to measure the impact of Covid-19 response on children's education? (Int Rep 2, Rec 13)

Mental Health

- Continue to support those who have experienced stress and anxiety - focus on emotional and psychological wellbeing long term as pandemic progresses (Int Rep 4, Rec 7/8).
- Engage with the Commonwealth Government to continue to extend mental health plans, including expanding the number of free psychologist and counsellor sessions that can be assessed (Int Rep 4, Rec 9).
- Make a commitment to increase mental health funding year on year, particularly for youth mental health" (see also TCC Youth Sub Committee comments) (Int Rep 4, Rec 12).
- The Committee recommends that the ACT Government include targeted programs to improve access to services for young people, particularly in the area of education, mental health, employment, housing, rental affordability and homelessness (Int Rep 4, Rec 23/24).

General Comments

Dedicated outreach needs to be provided to those who are vulnerable and without practical access to updated health and wellbeing information including those:

- that live alone;
- who do not have the technology to access online COVID and wellbeing notifications;
- who not until the pandemic, are at risk of developing social anxiety due to fears of COVID related ill-health; and
- that rely on public transport which have proved risky to use.

This outreach is suggested because those who do not have the technology to access COVID and wellbeing educational notifications rely on government announcements and media which by nature can be alarming and have a negative impact on health and wellbeing.

The pandemic has highlighted for many the importance of people or things that are near where they live. It would appear people miss their neighbours and their local haunts more than broader social events organised by organisations. Perhaps restrictions could take this into account.

2. THE TUGGERANONG COMMUNITY COUNCIL AND COVID 19

TCC has strictly complied with health directions issued in response to COVID 19. We were unable to hold many face to face meeting therefore and therefore had to invest in video conferencing technology. Effects on our operations included:

- Technology at TCC



- Internet connections of sufficient bandwidth to support conference
- Reliance on personal internet connections when hosting ZOOM only meetings
- Portable internet connections when hosting hybrid meeting
- Cameras, audio and screens when hosting hybrid meetings
- Security, preregistration
- Security barriers to using Zoom by government agencies
- Member technology
 - Lack of technical expertise
 - No or poor internet connection
 - Home IT equipment not capable of supporting video conferencing
- Preference for ZOOM meetings
 - Avoidance of having to go out especially in winter and at night
 - Adoption of hybrid meeting as normal practice allow for face-to-face and on-line participation.
- Meetings affected include: Monthly General Meeting; Monthly meetings of five sub-committees; Combined Community Council; Meeting with Government e.g. EPF
- Social interaction limited
 - Isolation felt by members
 - Loss of members
 - Screen time overload particularly for members working and studying from home.
 - When face-to-face possible precautions such as mask wearing and social distancing made members uncomfortable in physical attendance and either participated on-line or did not participate at all
 - Venues reluctant to host meetings when capacity limited need for other clients
- TCC events impacted
 - SouthFest 2020 was cancelled as it was not possible conduct the event in compliance with health direction
 - Loss of social engagement event with potential participation of 20,000
 - Loss of promotion of Tuggeranong clubs and associations
 - SouthFest 2021 was to be reimaged as a series of covid safe events in November 2021 however has now been deferred to February 2022
 - 2020 Brindabella Election Forum restructured with limited ticketed attendance and web meeting
- Covid issues addressed by TCC
 - Panel discussion with panellists from business chamber, sports and recreation and educations.
 - Mental health particular youth services
 - Panel discussion on business support and community mental health
- What we have heard
 - Concerns about vaccination
 - Official, media, and social media information mismatch
 - Vaccine hesitancy
 - Lock down fatigue



- Video conferencing fatigue
- Social isolation
- Mental health
- Social network breakdown
- Confidence in Chief Health Officer

3. FROM TUGGERANONG COMMUNITY COUNCIL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT SUB COMMITTEE

Many had major concerns over the impact of Covid on mental health– 40% of year 7 and 8 students in the youth survey said it effected their mental health. Other comments from the committee when asked about how they see others coping in the lockdown situation schools included:

- Worse thing is school load – “feels like doubling the work”.
- Some students don’t care about school just want to finish, not motivated.
- Particularly bad if in classes you are not interested in eg in high school don’t have much choice of subject studied.
- Concern that it will affect their future.
- At home distractions, little oversight.
- Some high school students feel overwhelmed, they haven’t the support of classmates.
- Some concern about access to mental health services. Young people mostly want face to face support i.e. person to person talking. Most see a zoom meeting, even a one-on-one zoom meeting as ‘Online Support” not ‘face to face’, they said that talking to someone on a screen is different to talking to a person.

On a positive note, it was mentioned that as tertiary learning it is all about self-motivation skills, those abilities learnt now will stand students in good stead and will be valuable in the future

4. COMMENTS FROM TCC MEMBERS/COMMUNITY

Overall - the ACT Government acted adequately in the circumstances and most people were happy with the support.

- Of Interest (positive):
 - Allowed life to be more simple – it was ‘time out’
 - Didn’t find it much different except could not go to local haunts to have coffee etc
 - Zoom meeting – did not have to travel to meetings (interstate) and able to attend meeting previously not available to them
 - Brought some families together eg family zoom meetings for those who don’t live in Canberra – allows them to regularly communicate with them
- Issues:
 - Masks – Not enough information was given on wearing of masks:
 - correct wearing,



- best type/style,
- need to replace disposable masks each and every time
- need to wash reusable masks regularly
- correct ways to discard or dispose of masks
- masks generated a lot of rubbish

- Mental and Physical Health:
 - not enough 'handy' information was provided – needed more 'in your face' eg the ACT Covid web site could have had pop-up support information on the front page where maximum exposure for those who checked daily for covid cases and information.
 - could have included on-line courses/programs or general information with at-home exercises, support services, acknowledgment of issues such as increased levels of alcohol and drug use, insomnia and anxiety.

- Cross Border information: Not enough commonplace information provided for those needing to cross over the ACT/NSW border, particularly when the lockdowns were being lifted

- Lack of consistency about how restrictions were applied eg differences with some shops, food outlets, chemists and doctors for access to their premises

- QR codes: many places did not clearly display signage – needed to be more open exposed

- Loneliness
 - loss of contact with very close people
 - not able to visit friends and relatives
 - not been able to do much with the neighbours

- Recommendations were often written in a negative language.

- Scams and cybersecurity: Government, commercial and retail services transitioned to telephone and on-line contacts. Online line shopping meant more direct to home deliveries. Scams increased through automated telephone calls (press '1' to be ripped off) and SMS containing malicious content under guise of government agencies or delivery agents.

Generational Effects/Differences

- Older populace
 - survived tough times in the past
 - missed grandkids, having hugs
 - not easy to source information on what you can and can't do

- Family
 - working from home
 - many jobs effected leading to emotional/financial etc stress
 - kids at home added to stress

- Younger populace
 - bored
 - not able to interact properly with wide number of school friends
 - stress with schoolwork and concern about their future
 - too much opportunity to interact socially and play games online rather than schoolwork



- other concerns also added pressure, eg concerns about climate change. Need to get positive messages out to kids when talking about the effect of Covid and climate change on their future.

5. WAY FORWARD

Address issues such as:

- Community groups
 - People who are disconnected need a means to reconnect.
 - There should be recognition of the importance of community groups in our society and the wide impact they have in supporting people through
 - a sense of belonging and being part of togetherness
 - growth through education and information and creating positive changes
 - personal support through sharing common interests of like-minded people
 - giving people pride in shared outcomes and achievements
 - connection and commitment to a common goal
 - assist in reigniting community groups that may have dissolved.

NOTE: How many community groups have folded following Covid 19 lockdown and what impact this has had?

- Initiatives to help people ‘unplug’ from screens by highlighting and encouraging outdoor activities and events for all ages of the community.

Acknowledge ‘bad habits’ of covid lockdown where people have become used to a new normal of being confined to their homes. Develop and promote ideas for ‘now is the time to refresh and renew’ in encouraging people to do things differently, such as - become more physically fit, find new adventures or places to see around Canberra with a focus on the outdoors, advertise local events, etc.

- Build better resilience in young people by
 - Promoting advantages of schooling, such as more employment opportunities, career advancement, higher income, etc.
 - Encouraging personal growth in setting goals and finding oneself in healthy relationships.
 - Increasing opportunities to work in teams, create safe and supportive venues and activities.
 - Provide improved mental health support, particularly ‘in-person’ mental health support.
- Business / Work
 - Small Business – provide on-going support or grants to re-establish Covid-affected businesses.
 - Encourage flexible approach for workers to continue to work from home where possible.



- Promote positive results and outcomes rather than focus on negative fallout of situations. This could encourage people, particularly the younger generation, to acknowledge that they 'did survive', thus build resilience for any future events that they may encounter.
- Provide better access to online learning opportunities to meet the needs of a wide range of demographics and that
 - is suitable for a variety of learning ages and skills;
 - is affordable;
 - is flexible in time; and
 - creates opportunities for people at all levels and proficiency.
- Improve **internet speed** in the ACT to enable people to engage in work, school and social connection from home.
- More publicity about the way forward and what the ACT Government is achieving or working towards, especially in and around Canberra.

Jeffrey R Bollard.

Jeffrey Bollard
President
Tuggeranong Community Council Inc