

# COVID-19: AN ASSESSMENT OF PARTNERS NEED

## Executive Summary



## GOALS OF THE INVESTIGATION

'In early April 2020, WHISE conducted interviews with a number of our partners to capture their experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic to increase our understanding of the impacts this is having on their organisation, departments, teams and at an individual level in regards to primary prevention activities. .

WHISE will use these insights to gain a stronger understanding of how we can support our partners and the community during this time of adjustment. To adapt, design and tailor existing or new programs and services to meet these needs now and as we all move into recovery.

## SCOPE OF THE INVESTIGATION

- To identify the impacts of COVID-19 on primary prevention work in the Southern Metro Region – both personally and professionally.
- To better understand how our partners delivering services in the region were adapting and evolving to the COVID-19 pandemic protocols and directions.
- To gain an insight into how WHISE might support our partners to better facilitate their work during COVID-19 during transition, lockdown and recovery.



## FINDINGS

Several key findings were identified through this rapid review of our partner's needs during COVID-19. They were themed under the following:

- Adapting to a changing work environment
- The impact of COVID-19 on primary prevention work
- Supporting our partners during COVID-19: recommendations from Partners
- Online support
- Recovery and supporting partners post COVID-19

Since undertaking the interviews, a significant shift has been seen in light of the reduction in COVID-19 cases throughout Australia. These changes have seen an easing of lockdown restrictions. Nevertheless, while these changes emphasise a move towards **recovery**, this assessment of partners need highlights the importance of continuing our support.

## WHAT'S NEXT

- Emphasising the importance of primary prevention work.
- Helping facilitate online meetings/forums/webinars to maintain connections between partners
- Emphasising a gender lens in terms of recovery to ensure equity.
- Supporting the well-being of partners.

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## IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON PRIMARY PREVENTION WORK

COVID-19 has significantly impacted the ability to undertake primary prevention work. Many of our partners told us that:

- Primary prevention work was halted during the lock down or was marginalised as resources were put into scaling up response work.
- Fewer resources were being allocated to primary prevention work at this time as response work was prioritised.
- A shift in community engagement was seen during this time, particularly in relation to more vulnerable individuals, clients, consumers and groups in the community.

However, for several partners, this time provided an opportunity “to look to what we can build on next in terms of primary prevention”.

## ADAPTING TO A CHANGING WORK ENVIRONMENT

### Transitioning to working from home

Partners reported a variety of challenges encountered in transitioning to working from home, including:

- Setting up work space at home, at times at added expense.
- Working alongside partners or children living at home.

Some partners expressed concerns about staff contemplating standing down or reducing hours to support children learning from home.

### Adapting to different/changing roles

The impact of COVID-19 affected how and where people worked, and the types of work undertaken. Some roles were redeployed or redirected to focus on response or due to no longer being able to perform or offer face to face consultations due to physical distancing restrictions. Concerns were voiced for vulnerable community groups. In particular, to expected increase of family violence rates and the impact of COVID-19 on women's welfare.

## SUPPORTING OUR PARTNERS DURING COVID-19

### Recommendations from partners

An emerging theme was that primary prevention work needed to continue even during times of emergency, suggestions included:

- How WHISE could support and prioritise primary prevention messaging in a consistent and relevant manner.
- Need for WHISE to support partners to continue to connect with one another to understand challenges being experienced and gain an insight into the types of work currently being carried out.
- For WHISE to help develop a data set to track the impact of COVID-19 through a gender lens.
- For WHISE to facilitate resources around self-care and internal advocacy for staff.

Partners acknowledged the importance of highlighting the continuing availability of specific services particularly in relation to sexual and reproductive health – namely access to abortion and contraception as well as family violence support.

### Online support

Partners welcomed a series of webinars from WHISE but emphasised the importance of these webinars being targeted to specific needs of partners.

Suggestions were given for webinars including:

- Foundational training on how to host a professional webinar
- How to highlight a gender lens to COVID-19
- How to manage disclosures
- Opportunity to share work being undertaken by partners.

### Recovery post COVID-19

During the first few weeks when COVID-19 emerged, the interviews revealed that recovery was not something that was currently being considered. Partners at that stage identified that WHISE could play a key role in defining what recovery might look like, particularly in terms of recovery through a gender lens.

A week or two later, partners started asking WHISE to help support and develop a framework and actions for recovery. They expressed the need for support tracking the impact of COVID-19, to assist in future planning.