

## Joint Statement

**Roundtable facilitated by  
David Shoebridge, NSW Greens MP**

# Community Priorities for Successful Handling of Covid Crisis

As active community members, organisations and leaders working across Western and South Western Sydney during this crisis, we have seen our communities disproportionately burdened by the failures of the State and Federal Government responses to COVID-19.

After more than two months of lockdown and stricter measures unevenly targeting our communities compared to other areas, we are demanding better financial and moral support as well as accountability.

Too many decisions in this crisis have caused further hardship and unnecessary pain to Western and South Western Sydney, which is home to a large proportion of the state's essential workers. The top-down approach has occurred without any real engagement with us or our communities and this lack of engagement has resulted in far-reaching consequences that have been far more damaging than needed.

Going forward we urge that governments at all levels must act in better faith, and ensure that genuine community consultation and engagement is central to the way crises are managed.

## **The State and Federal governments must urgently address the following:**

**Pay people to stay home to stop the spread. Introduce a simple, easy to access pandemic payment without unfair exemptions.**

Temporary residents and international students have once again been left out of financial support. Payments need to be easily accessible, universal and sufficient to prevent people from going into debt. The payments must be at least \$80 a day for those who were on income support before the lockdown and \$750 a week for those who are not working because of the lockdown.

### **Urgently supply additional housing and crisis housing.**

When people test positive for COVID, they have nowhere to go and often transmit to their families and household members. It is how the majority of Covid cases are spread. This is a more significant problem in W and SW Sydney with smaller housing units and larger households. There must be easy to access emergency alternative accommodation available for those needing to isolate.

### **A better vaccine booking system. Easy to access and single entry point.**

The current vaccine booking system is difficult to use. It is not streamlined. There are multiple websites, multiple entry points and the booking systems are unnecessarily complex. There needs to be a clear, easy way to book vaccinations which will ultimately benefit the community across the board.

### **Priority vaccinations for aid and relief workers and volunteers.**

Vaccines must be provided as a priority to paid and volunteer aid and relief workers who are on the ground in the hardest hit areas without adequate vaccine protection. This is in addition to prioritising frontline essential workers.

### **Clearer and more consistent messaging.**

Access to information and public health resources is confusing and constantly changing. Organisations within these communities know their communities best and these valuable organisations need to be funded partners who are consulted with and trusted to deliver clear information to their communities.

### **One set of consistent rules for all of Greater Sydney.**

The inconsistent and ultimately unfair application of rules across the city has made people living in the LGAs 'of concern' feel targeted. For example, the introduction of curfew is not evidence-based and is a policing rather than public health response to Covid. If there is a credible public health basis to curfews that justifies their imposition then they should be applied uniformly across greater Sydney. The fact this has not happened adds to a strong and justifiable sense that lockdown rules are unfairly targeted at W and SW Sydney and reinforce already damaging racial and economic discrimination.

### **Transfer of resource allocation from police and the army to community nurses, social workers and mental health support workers.**

There must be a switch of resources from policing people to supporting people. The heavy presence of police and armed forces in LGAs 'of concern' has added to the stress of the situation. Many people have reported leaving their houses for exercise and getting stopped by police multiple times. Police are knocking on doors of households with Covid for the purposes of enforcing lockdown rules without any concern for wellbeing and welfare, whereas what those individuals and families need most is health and community support.

### **More mental health support.**

Many people do not have access to the support they need. There must be a targeted access strategy including the urgent establishment of online counselling, this must be culturally appropriate and in language with professional counsellors fluent in community languages and cultural practises.

### **Better hospital coordination.**

We need more coordination across health districts. The Government needs to listen to its own research and leverage it. This crisis has exposed the chronic lack of hospital beds and ICU units in Western and South Western Sydney and that imbalance must be addressed as a priority.

### **Accessible health communication and support for COVID positive people isolating at home.**

Many COVID positive people in SWS and WS have received one text message when they were notified but were not followed up by health staff for days. They were unsure and concerned about what they must do to keep themselves and their families safe. We acknowledge that the system is under stress and that each district employs a different process, however, easy access to information in the early days of infection is crucial for everyone's safety. We need each local health district in the areas 'of concern' to organise regular online webinars for people who have tested positive, providing them with accessible and clear information about what to expect and what they need to do.

### **Immediate actionable tasks:**

- People are having trouble paying their elevated energy bills due to the extended stay-at-home orders as well as homeschooling requirements. To address this the state government must immediately expand the availability of Energy Account Payment Assistance vouchers so they are much more widely available
- Of most pressing concern is the high registration fees paid by truck owner drivers who need direct assistance with the waiver of registration fees for trucks that are parked in LGAs of concern.

With so many people without work or less work the costs of state fees and charges like vehicle registration should be temporarily reduced or waived in LGAs of concern.

- The social isolation of lockdown can be partly addressed by improved internet access. Wifi packages should be provided by the State Government to the most vulnerable such as pensioners and especially families with school-aged children in the LGAs of concern.

### **Post-Covid pressures**

- We know that many large and ongoing payments have been deferred because of the lockdown, especially rental and mortgage payments. Plans must be made now to assist people when deferred payments are due to survive the economic shock. This must include protections on evictions and direct financial support.
- This crisis has exposed the social and economic divide across Sydney and within communities. The patchwork of government assistance with its unfair exclusions, inadequate payments and arbitrary criteria has caused significant and unnecessary hardship. This must be reformed and progress made towards a universal financial support payment that leaves no one behind.

## Signed:

Randa Kattan, Chief Executive Officer,  
**Arab Council Australia**

Dr. Haroon Kasim, Co-Founder,  
**The Humanism Project**

Rosanna Barbero, General Manager,  
**Addison Road Community Centre  
Organisation**

Dr Rateb Jneid, President, **Australian  
Federation of Islamic Councils**

Zeynep Korkmaz, Youth and  
Democracy Leader - **Democratic  
Kurdish Community Centre of NSW**

Amar Singh, President, **Turbans 4  
Australia INC.**

**Muslim Women Australia (MWA)**

Alex Long and Youth Ambassadors,  
CEO of **Multicultural Youth Affairs  
Network (MYAN NSW)**

Julie Williams, community member  
and member of the Western Sydney  
Watch Committee.

Tiareteina Robertson, Youth Advocate  
Leader - **Blacktown Youth Services  
Association**

Uncle Dave Bell

Anjum Rafiqi, **Stand with Kashmir Inc**

Bashir Sawalha, President of the  
General Union of Palestinian Workers,  
Australia and the Vice President of the  
Arab Australian Federation

Abbas Raza Alvi, Community  
Networker and President - **We  
Australians Are Creative  
Incorporated**

Kersej Balewai Rabuatoka (Grace),  
Coordinator Volunteer Food Hampers

Mohammad Rashedul Haque,  
President, **Bangladesh Community  
Council Inc.**

Sheila Ngoc Pham, Independent  
Writer, Researcher and Health  
Communications Consultant

Muhadissa Haidari, Youth Ambassador  
- Multicultural Youth Affairs Network  
(MYAN NSW) & Multicultural Support  
Worker - **Community Migrant  
Resource Centre**

Abelrhman Dameen, Committee  
member for **Sydney Sudanese Youth  
Organization**, Activist and Community  
leader

Shibly Abdullah, Lecturer & Program  
Coordinator, Accounting & Business  
Studies, Charles Sturt University Study  
Centres; Member, Muslim Community  
Core Team, Sydney Alliance; Social  
Activist and Community Leader,  
Bangladeshi Community.

Dr Vikrant Kishore, **South Asians for  
Inclusiveness Inc.**

Jyotsna Sharma, **Hindus for Human  
Rights Australia & New Zealand**

Neha Madhok on behalf of **Democracy  
in Colour**



Joint Statement

Roundtable facilitated by  
David Shoebridge, NSW Greens MP

Community Priorities for Successful Handling of Covid Crisis