

Item 3.1

Supporting Vulnerable Communities Through the Pandemic

File No: S051491

Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

Impact of the Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic continues to have a devastating impact on our City. Many of our fellow citizens have lost connection with their family and friends, lost businesses, employment and the ability to support their families, and lost the ability to participate in the activities that bring them joy. Sadly, an increasing number have also lost loved ones.

Many people say that this lockdown, which has now stretched for three months, has been harder than the restrictions imposed last year. Whilst necessary to protect us from Covid-19, it is taking its toll.

This has led to a mental health crisis, with some truly shocking statistics noting the increases in people seeking assistance from services, harming themselves or taking their own lives.

With the Federal Government finally securing the supply of vaccines, and an increased effort from the NSW Government to facilitate access through mass vaccination hubs, I am pleased to see that more than 80 per cent of people within our State have now had at least one dose of a vaccine. The NSW Government has also announced a 'roadmap' for what life will look like when we reach 70 per cent of the State having had both doses of a vaccine. Expected in late October, I know we are all looking forward to a greater level of freedom.

However, I remain concerned that many of our most vulnerable community members will be left behind. The rates of vaccination within our Local Government Area are lower than the State average and many of those who remain unvaccinated experience disadvantages, live in social and affordable housing, or are members of our Aboriginal and multicultural communities. They are at risk now and this will only increase when more of our economy opens up next month. This risk has been further highlighted by the rapid increase in Covid cases in areas such as Redfern, Waterloo and Glebe.

This is a critical issue that requires immediate action.

Social Services Roundtable

On 9 September 2021, I held a roundtable meeting with social service providers to discuss the impacts of the pandemic and restrictions on our vulnerable communities.

We heard that many of our most disadvantaged are being disproportionately impacted by restrictions, due to an existing lack of housing and food security, as well as inadequate levels of income support from the Federal Government.

There has been a massive increase in demand for food relief, which is putting pressure on community organisations who are working around the clock to help people meet their daily needs.

A lack of affordable housing means many people are barely able to get by even when working multiple jobs. When these jobs are lost due to restrictions, they simply cannot afford to pay rent and feed themselves and their families.

The income support payments available from the Federal Government are less than those provided last year. Regardless of any emergency payments, the base rate of Job Seeker must be increased to provide people with an appropriate safety net.

Hundreds of people experiencing homelessness have been temporarily housed, but we must ensure that the work is being done now to ensure there is appropriate transitional and ongoing housing provided when restrictions are lifted. We cannot have a situation where people are back on the street without support.

We must continue to advocate for structural social inequities to be addressed.

The roundtable meeting also provided an opportunity to highlight the great work being undertaken by service providers, as well as our own City staff, who continue to work hard for our community. This includes:

- Supporting food supply services to ensure no one goes hungry – we've provided \$300,000 to both OzHarvest and Foodbank and \$100,000 to SecondBite.
- Investing \$50,000 to purchase protective face masks.
- Providing an increased outreach program to help connect residents with mental health and social connection support services.
- Offering new community emergency quick response grants totalling \$250,000 to support small-scale initiatives helping vulnerable communities through the pandemic. Up to \$10,000 will be available for not-for-profit organisations and unincorporated community groups.
- Securing emergency accommodation for non-residents and asylum seekers through the Haymarket Foundation and the Department of Communities and Justice.

Increasing Access to Vaccinations

In recent weeks I have been meeting regularly with the Sydney Local Health District (SLHD) to explore ways in which we can increase the accessibility of vaccinations within the City of Sydney Local Government Area and for social housing tenants and our local Aboriginal communities in particular.

This includes more, better located and consistent vaccination clinics, as well as outreach services that can also be paired with information, testing, and providing critical supplies, such as masks and food. To enable this, we have offered many City facilities, that have otherwise been closed due to restrictions.

As a result of these discussions, I am pleased to advise that several vaccination clinics have now been opened or extended, through until December:

- Peter Forsyth Auditorium, Franklyn Street, Glebe
- Ultimo Community Centre, William Henry Street, Ultimo
- Green Square Library, Botany Road, Zetland
- National Centre of Indigenous Excellence, George Street, Redfern
- Northcott Community Centre, Devonshire Street, Surry Hills
- Flourish Australia, Buckingham Street, Surry Hills
- Ozanam Learning Centre, Forbes Street, Woolloomooloo

Sydney Local Health District staff will also be going door to door in social housing towers in Redfern and Waterloo to offer vaccinations.

I would like to thank all of those involved at Sydney Local Health District, as well as our own City staff, who have made this possible.

We will all continue to be vigilant, meet regularly and explore every opportunity to provide the best opportunity for our community to be kept safe and to get vaccinated.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council note that vulnerable communities within the City of Sydney are being disproportionately impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and associated restrictions;
- (B) Council note our previous support of the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) campaign to 'Raise the Rate' of Federal Government income support payments through a resolution on 24 June 2019;
- (C) Council thank the many dedicated service providers, Sydney Local Health District and City of Sydney staff for their ongoing support of our community and for enabling a significant increase in the provision of Covid-19 vaccinations to our most vulnerable;
- (D) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to continue to provide access to City facilities for vaccination clinics as a priority for the remainder of the year;

- (E) the Lord Mayor be requested to write to the Prime Minister requesting an increase in the Job Seeker payment; and
- (F) the Lord Mayor be requested to write to the Premier requesting the urgent provision of more social and affordable housing within the City of Sydney, as well as Greater Sydney, and a funded transition plan for people experiencing homelessness who have been temporarily housed during the current lockdown.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE

Lord Mayor