

COVID-19: Operation of domestic and family violence services during the pandemic period

COVID-19 and domestic and family violence

For people experiencing domestic and family violence (DFV) being at home is not always a safe place. We know that the incidence of DFV has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic period. Measures introduced to reduce the spread of COVID-19 such as changes to access to support services, social restrictions, home schooling and self-isolation and -quarantine requirements, as well as the stress caused by the economic impacts such as unemployment, have increased the risk of DFV.

Specialist DFV services have changed their model of care to respond to COVID-19 measures. As social distancing restrictions ease and tighten depending on the amount of COVID-19 circulating in Queensland communities, it is important that health clinicians and people impacted by DFV are aware that DFV frontline services, including crisis accommodation, police and courts continue to operate to support women, children and families during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, the Queensland Government has committed to ensuring that regardless of restrictions on social distancing and movement people will always be allowed to leave their home to escape DFV. People leaving a dangerous situation will not be fined.

Specialist Services

- DFV services, and sexual assault support services will continue to operate throughout the pandemic period. There may at times be changes to modes of service delivery as required to maintain the safety of staff and clients.
- DVConnect, Queensland's statewide DFV crisis service will continue to operate during the COVID-19 pandemic period and is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to assist those at risk or in need of assistance.
- For those in need of support DVConnect can be contacted through their hotlines:
 - Womensline 1800 811 811, anytime 24/7
 - Mensline 1800 600 636, between 9am – midnight, 7 days
 - Sexual Assault Helpline 1800 010 120, between 7.30am – 11.30am, 7 days.
- Kids Helpline - For children and young people (5 - 25 years) Kids Helpline is available 24/7 by phone, WebChat and email. www.kidshelpline.com.au
- The Integrated Service Responses and High Risk Teams in Logan-Beenleigh, Mount Isa, Cherbourg, Ipswich, Cairns, Brisbane, Mackay and Moreton (Caboolture) are continuing to operate and perform business as usual functions, where appropriate, ensuring they maintain support victims and children within the context of potential increased risk related to COVID-19
- Intensive Family Support Services and Family and Child Connect continue to provide support to families via online, telephone and where required face to face contact with provisions in place.

Queensland Police Service

- Continue to call Triple Zero if a DFV incident is occurring right now or if someone is in danger.

- The Queensland Police Service (QPS) continues to respond to all DFV calls for service during the whole-of-government COVID-19 response.
- If community members have information about DFV and an offence is not happening now and the person is safe, then contact Policelink on 131 444.
- It is acknowledged that restrictions on movement as a result of COVID-19, including staged lockdowns and self-isolation and -quarantine may cause barriers to reporting incidents of DFV to police.
- QPS has developed alternative online/SMS for members of the community to request police contact in relation to DFV incidents.
- The new online reporting is for non-life-threatening incidents. If the safest way for people to contact police is online, then use the options at <https://www.police.qld.gov.au/domestic-violence>. Police will then return contact with that person by phone or email as indicated by the enquirer.
- Police also have an SMS (text message) capability for hearing impaired and identified vulnerable people. Individuals can [register here](#) for this service.

Courts

- All Magistrates' Courts are open. DFV matters continue to be heard with urgent and high-risk matters being prioritised.
- Applications for DFV orders can be made online or filed by post to the Court if it is not urgent.
- Urgent applications can still be made in person at the Court by private applicants if QPS have determined that a Police Protection Notice is not appropriate.

Housing

- The Department of Housing customer [website](#) is being frequently updated with information on housing assistance being offered to Queenslanders, as well the latest updates and alerts regarding actions and advice from the government.
- The [Residential Rental Hub](#) provides simple and clear information for tenants, property managers and owners with material and services to assist them in sustaining their tenancy during COVID-19.
- The Hub is a great resource that you can recommend to clients who might have queries about what recent government announcements mean for them and what support is available.
- The Residential Rental Hub is a joint initiative of the Residential Tenancy Authority (RTA), Real Estate Institute of Queensland, Tenants Queensland and the Department of Housing and Public Works.

Disability

- The [Queensland Health website](#) has a range information available for people with a disability.
- [Women With Disabilities Australia \(WWDA\)](#) has created a [Coronavirus COVID-19 page](#) of resources. It includes information on issues for women with disability such as access to grocery items and medications, as well as Auslan interpretations, easy English factsheets and resources for surviving social isolation.
- [People with Disability Australia \(PWDA\)](#) has created a [COVID-19 Hub](#). This hub includes latest news, accessible resource, where to get help, information on disability support services and more.

Elder Abuse

- The [Queensland Health website](#) provides a range of information specifically for older Queenslanders.
- In March 2020, COMPASS launched the [Guiding Action on Elder Abuse website](#). The website includes clear and detailed information about:
 - recognising elder abuse

- help for people experiencing elder abuse, and
- how to respond if you suspect an older person is experiencing elder abuse.
- 1800ElderHelp (1800 353 374) is a free phone service providing free and confidential support. The phone line was established by the Australian Government in collaboration with state and territories and is available to provide free and confidential support.
- Call the [Elder Abuse Helpline](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/patient-safety/duty-of-care/domestic-family-violence/healthcare-workers) (1300 651 192) available 9am–5pm, Monday to Friday, for free and confidential advice for anyone experiencing elder abuse or who suspects someone they know may be experiencing elder abuse

DFV resources for health professionals

The revised DFV Toolkit of Resources, which includes a COVID-19 DFV Factsheet is now available to all Queensland health professionals at: <https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/patient-safety/duty-of-care/domestic-family-violence/healthcare-workers>