

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

A phone survey of 351 CHSP clients and three focus groups (metro, regional SA and CALD), with 17 CHSP service providers was undertaken in May-June 2020 to:

Identify the needs and expectations of CHSP clients as SA emerges from the COVID-19 isolation restrictions

Ascertain the capacity of CHSP service providers to respond to the needs and expectations of CHSP clients, including the identification of any barriers pertaining to this.

Inform how CHSP clients had managed during COVID-19 lock down

Provide details about their use of technology

Comment on pre and post COVID perceptions: What clients are looking forward to and any concerns they may have.

KEY FINDINGS

CLIENT NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS

When COVID-19 Restrictions end:

82% of clients will need their services to go back to how they were before the lock down. 9% indicated that they would need additional services, mainly one-off home maintenance services.

100% of clients receiving Social Support - Group services before the lock down period clearly stated their need to return to their group programs for the sake of their wellbeing.

SERVICE PROVIDER RESPONSE TO CLIENT NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS

Service providers stated that for most, a return to delivering Domestic Assistance services at full capacity will be relatively easily achieved, and that many clients have already reinstated their services.

The biggest challenge facing service providers now as COVID-19 restrictions are lifted is the reinstatement of Social Support – Group.

The main issues are:

- Maintaining COVID-safe conditions for clients, staff and volunteers.
- Transporting older people to and from social support groups whilst maintaining COVID-safe protocols.
- Providing meals and beverages: an integral component of many social support group programs due to SA Health regulations which forbids the serving of these in Council-owned facilities.
- Safely re-engaging volunteers into Social Support Groups programs – many of these groups are reliant on volunteers to provide transport and meals and as a majority of volunteers are older and therefore considered vulnerable, they are reluctant to return.

Service providers are actively seeking creative ways to address these issues including:

- Adopting staged approaches
- Holding smaller groups
- Reducing the length of time of groups, enabling more than one 'shift' per day.
- Providing food that clients can take away with them when they leave the group.
- Encouraging clients to find and use alternative transport options, including providing taxi coupons for use with local taxi drivers.
- Focussing on reactivating groups that aren't dependent on transport – ie those activities that clients usually attend via their own means.
- Continuing to provider social support via regular phone calls using volunteers.
- Brokering services to other agencies

Reactivating Social Support Group programs is extremely time consuming and despite their best efforts, service providers are aware that these arrangements are not fully meeting the need of their clients.

52% of clients indicated they had felt more lonely during isolation and this was higher for CALD clients (78%) and ATSI clients (86%).

KEY FINDINGS CON'T

HOW CLIENTS MANAGED DURING COVID-19 LOCK DOWN

The majority of clients had managed quite well in a number of areas including accessing information, receiving the support and services they needed to live well, looking after their health and well-being, and knowing how to access medical treatment if they needed it. 47% of clients had received regular phone calls from their services provider and 91% of them agreed that this communication had provided some comfort and they felt safe, reassured and connected to the service.

Of those who had suspended domestic assistance services during lock down:

- 75% had relied on others including partners and family members to undertake domestic tasks.
- 56% had also been “doing it themselves”.
- 14% had been “doing without”.
- 62% stated that these arrangements could not continue after lock down, mainly as family members had to return to work or other commitments, or that it had impacted negatively on their own health.

While many clients had stated that they could manage in a practical way, this was not the case regarding loneliness. 52% of clients indicated they had felt more lonely during isolation and this was higher for CALD clients (78%) and ATSI clients (86%).

STAYING INFORMED DURING COVID-19 LOCK DOWN

- 95% of clients relied on television to stay informed about the COVID-19 situation.
- 47% received calls or newsletters from services providers.
- 35% relied on the radio.
- 34% relied on family members.

USE OF TECHNOLOGY DURING COVID-19 LOCK DOWN

- 19% visited the Commonwealth Department of Health website and 18% visited the SA Health website.
- 31% had a telephone consultation with a GP or other medical practitioner.
- 9% had an online consultation with a GP or other medical practitioner.
- 19% had uses on-line shopping.
- 30% had used on-line banking.
- Although over half had used a mobile phone, only 14% had used the internet to access information, thereby not fully utilising the smart phone function of their device.

60% used some type of technology of which 52% used a mobile phone.

Amongst the 40% who did not use technology:

- 46% did not have any devices.
- 44% were not interested in owning or using a device.
- 41% stated they don't understand how to use technology.
- 6% stated they couldn't afford a device.
- 73% indicated they were not interested in learning about technology and its uses at home for shopping, banking, telehealth or social interactions.

Nearly 30% said they were interested or maybe interested in learning about technology.

THE FUTURE – LOOKING FORWARD TO:

Overall, the majority (72%) of clients are looking forward to socialising again. This was higher for CALD clients (88%) and ATSI clients (86%).

- 65% are looking forward to going out again.
- 47% are looking forward to seeing family.
- 34% are looking forward to buying whatever they want from the shops.
- 33% want things to return to how they were.

THE FUTURE - CONCERNS

Clients are also worried:

- 46% are concerned that the coronavirus will still be around and /or there won't be a vaccine for a while.
- 21% are concerned that things will be more expensive.
- 19% fear an economic recession.
- 15% that there will be a high unemployment rate.

SERVICE PROVIDER RESPONSE

Workers in the aged care sector are well aware that older people are more likely to be disadvantaged if they have not embraced the use of technology, therefore service providers were not surprised by the number who had stated they were not interested in learning about technology, as this correlated with their own experiences.

Although most clients had stated they were not interested in learning about technology, service providers considered it positive that nearly 30% had said “yes” or “maybe” during a time of uncertainty and change. This presented an opportunity for the future especially as there exists new devices specifically designed for those who find navigating ‘traditional’ devices overwhelming, and that have such features as one touch audio and video calls, messages, emergency alerts, shared calendars and photo sharing.

Service providers are also aware of the anxiety that some clients are experiencing due to the easing of restrictions, and to address this they will continue to communicate with them through phone calls, newsletters and in other ways to reassure them that reinstatement of services, including social support groups, will be undertaken in a COVID-safe manner.

CHSP service providers would like the Department of Health to be aware that reinstating COVID-safe CHSP services is time consuming and requires considerable resources for planning and implementation. This has both financial and reporting implications. They would also like the Department to be aware that the new flexibility arrangements enabling them to reallocate funding between service types has been effective and appreciated, however there are concerns that clients will expect this to be an ongoing feature of CHSP post COVID-19 recovery.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The research undertaken for this project has identified that the CHSP sector is facing the following major issues:

- Confusion around the State Government restriction requirements that need to be met by CHSP providers for the reinstatement of Social Support-Group programs that are COVID-safe (meet Australian Government and SA Government restrictions)
- Reinstatement of Transport needs of clients that are COVID-safe (meet Australian Government and SA Government restrictions)
- Lack of utilisation/future uptake of technology by CHSP clients restricting the access to urgent and current information of both State and Commonwealth health updates/warnings.
- Resilience of CHSP clients – many are experiencing loneliness and anxiety about the future.
- Potential shortage of volunteers as some are anxious about returning to their roles.

It is recommended that:

1. The Australian Government Department of Health advocates and provides advice to the SA Government on to how best support the unique needs of older people who need to return to their social support programs, and that there is collaboration between the relevant SA Government Departments and the CHSP sector to identify ways to overcome identified barriers.
2. That additional resources be made available to the CHSP sector to address the COVID-safe transport needs of older people during the COVID-19 recovery period, to enable them to re-connect with their social networks.
3. That resources be made available to the CHSP sector to address the wellbeing and resilience needs of CHSP sector including staff, volunteers, clients, carers and their broader communities.
4. That resources be made available to the CHSP sector to facilitate access to programs such as ‘Tech Savvy Seniors’ and ‘Be Connected’ involving the provision of one-to-one or individualised support in a small group setting to provide older people with more opportunities to learn about technology and its uses at home for shopping, banking, Telehealth and social interactions.

