



**Australian Government**

**National Indigenous Australians Agency**

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Chief Executive Officer  
Ray Griggs AO, CSC

Reference: EC20-000290

Dear Chief Executive Officer/Activity Manager

**COVID-19 update**

I am writing to provide an update about COVID-19 and provide guidance to support you in delivery of activities funded under the Australian Government’s Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS).

In managing this situation, the Federal [Department of Health](#) has lead responsibility for the Australian Government and its response is focused on early identification of cases, social distancing, isolation, contact tracing and quarantine where necessary. However, contingency planning is necessary given the high likelihood that larger scale community outbreaks will occur in the near future. It is important to note, that the respective state and territory health departments are responsible for managing their jurisdictions’ responses to COVID-19 (refer [www.health.gov.au/Covid19-plan](http://www.health.gov.au/Covid19-plan) for more detailed information on the Australian health sector’s emergency response plan for COVID-19).

It is vital that your organisation continues to keep up to date with advice published by the [Department of Health](#), as well as by your state or territory health authority. You might also find it useful to review recent advice from [Safe Work Australia](#) on the relevant work, health and safety implications for your workforce. These information sources will be useful in the management of the health and safety of employees and program participants. These sources provide details regarding the isolation requirements for people who have been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19, and self-isolation for people who have returned from overseas (go to [Smart Traveller](#) and [World Health Organisation](#) for up to date information).

**Potential impacts on funded activities and service delivery**

The National Indigenous Australian Agency (NIAA) has extensive and close engagement with around 400 Indigenous communities across Australia, including many remote locations. It is important that the NIAA supports Australian Government efforts to reduce the spread of COVID-19 to communities. On this basis, I have implemented a temporary halt to travel for NIAA staff for non-essential purposes where the same objectives could be achieved via

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tele/videoconference, or where the trip could be postponed. While implementing the temporary halt, the NIAA is focussed on the importance of maintaining essential services and engagement in communities. The NIAA is carefully balancing community needs with the public health implications of any travel. The current travel restriction also means events requiring people to travel to or from communities (including remote or vulnerable) to major centres will be deferred. A number of communities have also restricted access for non-essential travel.

I expect that you are already looking at business continuity arrangements including practical, flexible practices, within your own organisations. I also expect that IAS-funded services continue to the fullest extent possible in order to minimise any unnecessary disruptions to serviced communities (be they in urban, regional or remote settings). The benefits of continuing delivery of services needs to be balanced with managing the risk of spreading the virus through delivery of a funded activity.

Regardless of where your activity is delivered, your organisation is likely to be directly or indirectly impacted by COVID-19. If you are in doubt about your organisation's ability to continue delivery of your funded activity due to COVID-19, you should seek advice from your NIAA Agreement Manager or relevant NIAA Regional Manager.

If your activity requires travel to community (including remote or vulnerable) please consider the following:

- Is the funded activity important to ensuring continuation of essential services? This could include, but is not limited to, activities related to the provision of fundamental needs such as food security, community safety, health services and environmental health.
- Is there a way of delivering the activity or service without people travelling to or from community?
- If travel is necessary, assess if staff (or a close family member) have travelled overseas recently, if they are showing signs of being unwell or if they have been in contact with individuals affected by COVID-19.
- Ensure good hygiene practices (including avoiding unnecessary close contact) are observed whilst in community.

If you have questions about this letter or need further information on latest conditions with regard to travel please contact your relevant NIAA Regional Manager.

I am aware of additional questions being raised about the impacts of COVID-19 on Community Development Program (CDP) participants. At the end of this letter you will find additional advice related to CDP matters. The Provider Portal will also be updated regularly with advice for CDP providers.

With regard to your management of employees directly or indirectly impacted by COVID-19, this is ultimately a matter for your organisation based on your management practices and should be guided by health advice and directives from state and territory governments.

**Consultation and Feedback**

The NIAA is committed to working with our service providers and relevant peak bodies to anticipate and respond to the particular challenges COVID-19 poses to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

I will continue to update you as needed. In the interim, please continue to stay up to date and follow any advice issued from health authorities.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in red ink that reads "Ray Griggs". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**RAY GRIGGS**  
Chief Executive Officer

16 March 2020

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR ORGANISATIONS DELIVERING THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (CDP)

Mutual obligations remain in place at this stage. Any changes for particular areas affected by coronavirus or other extenuating circumstances will be considered on a case by case basis in line with existing procedures.

If your staff are contacted by a job seeker / participant who advises they are unwell and may have been in contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 they should be directed to call, **but not attend**, Centrelink to discuss obtaining a Major Personal Crisis exemption (using the contact numbers below). Major Personal Crisis exemptions may be granted for a period of 14 days. Supporting evidence will **not** be required for this initial exemption as long as this falls within the Department of Health advice as grounds for self-isolation. Providers should also review the job seeker/participants immediate requirements, and reschedule any appointments or activities pending the result of Centrelink's determination to avoid any suspension of payment.

- Newstart Allowance, JobSeeker Payment and Special Benefit recipients call 132 850
- Youth Allowance recipients can call 132 490
- Parenting Payment Single recipients with mutual obligation requirements call 136 150
- Indigenous Australians can also contact the Centrelink Indigenous Call Centre on 1800 136 380.

Please refer to the Services Australia website for the other relevant contact numbers:

<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/contact-us/phone-us>

If you have information that a job seeker / participant has recently returned from overseas or has been in contact with someone confirmed to have COVID-19 but has **not** self-isolated, your staff can direct the job seeker / participant to **not attend activities / appointments or leave the premises**. In such circumstances, the job seeker / participant should be advised to call, **but not attend**, Centrelink to seek an exemption.

We encourage you to regularly check the Provider Portal for further updates.

### CDP activities

We are aware that some job seekers / participants have expressed concerns about attending appointments or undertaking group-based activities. At this stage, the advice is that activities should continue as usual, unless the Department of Health advises otherwise. In some instances, you may wish to use existing flexibility under the Project Agreement and/or Operational Guidance to negotiate alternative activities or conduct appointments by phone or online methods.

You may wish to consider incorporating into all toolbox talks information on hand washing and other preventative measures. The Department of Health recommends that employers use



information at: <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-what-you-need-to-know>

If a site closure is warranted, the NIAA will deploy a streamlined approach to ensure this can be actioned quickly, please contact your Regional Manager or Account Manager to discuss further.

