

SERVICES, SUPPORT AND INFORMATION: COVID-19

FOR WOMEN LIVING WITH HIV

Our members are affected in different ways by COVID-19.

Positive Women Victoria is here for all women living with HIV during this time. We're changing the way we deliver our programs, but also using the opportunity to try some new ideas, including options for members to get together online.

Keep an eye out in your email inbox for updates and opportunities.

COVID-19 BASICS

In our previous Fact Sheet, we've summarised what is known about COVID-19, a potentially serious respiratory infection (a virus) transmitted mainly by airborne droplet transmission.

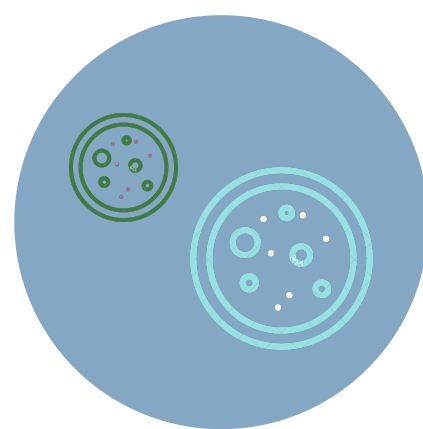
For some people in the community, getting COVID-19 may be very serious and dangerous. If you are living with HIV but are otherwise well, it is not thought that your health is at greater risk during this time.

However, if you are older, have heart or lung conditions, or are a diabetic, there may be additional reasons for you to exercise precautions against this virus.

Unfortunately, as you may be aware, this illness has had very serious effects in communities in the US, Spain, Italy, and some other countries.

We can all do our bit to make sure that our communities are safe and well, and minimise the number of people potentially affected at any time by:

- Following all requirements and advice of our governments and health authorities, by staying at home at home and restricting yourself to going out for supplies, medical care, to get exercise, or other essential reasons like working or caring for others
- Practising common sense hygiene to protect others and avoid infections: wash your hands before and after leaving the house, keep a physical distance between you and others (at least 1.5 metres) when you are outside of the home, and other measures. [More information here.](#)
- Make some changes in how you interact socially by not physically interacting with others outside your household (such as at parties, visits or dinners), and instead, staying in touch and socialising in other ways, such as chatting online, by email or over the phone. See below for more tips on creative ways to stay in touch.



HOW LONG WILL THIS LAST?

Many people have asked us how long this situation may last. The honest answer is, it is difficult to say, as there is a lot that experts are learning about this situation.

What we do know is that in Australia, our response is working in keeping the numbers of people in the community who have this virus significantly lower than in many other countries. We have been able to save many lives and keep our community relatively healthy by caring for each other, and supporting the effort to make sure those who might be affected by this are kept safe.

POSITIVE WOMEN VICTORIA'S RESPONSE

At the moment, unfortunately, we, like many other organisations, have had to take the advice of the government and health experts and reduce our face-to-face contact.

As you know, our office is closed, but all our staff are still working. Our peer support staff have been working with many of our members to find out what is needed, and get people the services and support that is needed.

To let us know what you need, ask a question or find out how we can support you:

- Phone or text us
- Email us
- Contact us through our website
- Keep up-to-date with info on our [website](#) or [Facebook](#).

At the moment, it's not feasible for us to do mailouts, so we are getting in touch with all our members by email, by text message, or by phone to encourage you to keep up to date and stay in touch the way that suits you best. Please let us know your preferences.

CONTACT US

PHONE: (03) 9863 8747

MOBILE: 0478 827 217

EMAIL: info@positivewomen.org.au



CONNECTING DIFFERENTLY

Obviously, COVID-19 is a community-wide concern, and we don't do this alone.

One of the main changes we have had to introduce is to stop holding our face-to-face events for the time being. It's not possible or safe for us to have people meeting in person or in groups at the moment. While that's disappointing, it's necessary that we don't schedule events until we're advised that we safely and legally can.

But there are some alternatives. We hope to trial a couple of online social events with one or two of our small regular lunch groups. And if that works, we may open up a couple more. Ideas we are looking at include online art classes or info sessions.

Our partner organisations, including [Living Positive Victoria](#), are also looking at online programs and events.

But it's something you can do yourself. If you would like to chat to us about using technologies like Zoom (an easy-to-use program allowing you to talk and chat using your computer or phone) to catch up with other women living with HIV, let us know, and we can help you through it, do a test run with you, or help put a small group of women in touch.

MEETING YOUR NEEDS

Our peer support team are here for you. We can help by:

- Making sure that you have the information you need to access your medicines
- Put you in touch with others who might help you: social workers, or people who can look after your mental health or wellbeing
- Discussing options such as support with fees for studying online, using your time to learn new skills through the [PWV Rose Fund](#), or providing assistance for you to up-skill and stay in touch; and/or
- Assisting with emergency financial needs through our food voucher program or referral to other programs for people experiencing financial hardship.

And of course, we are always here to help with issues related to HIV, as an understanding ear, a source of knowledge and lived experience, and to help you meet your social, practical and emotional needs on the journey to wellbeing.





CORONAVIRUS: WHAT GOVERNMENT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE

Over the past few weeks, the Federal Government has stepped in with some important financial assistance programs and changes to existing programs for those whose income has been affected by coronavirus shutdowns. These include:

- Increased payments and support for people on unemployment benefits (JobSeeker)
- A [payment scheme](#) to fund businesses to continue to pay the wages of eligible employees in industries affected by the coronavirus shutdown (JobKeeper). Your employer needs to register for this program, so if you have been stood down or your employment has been affected, get in touch with them if you haven't already. You'll need to have been working with that employer permanently, part-time, or as a casual employee for more than 12 months.

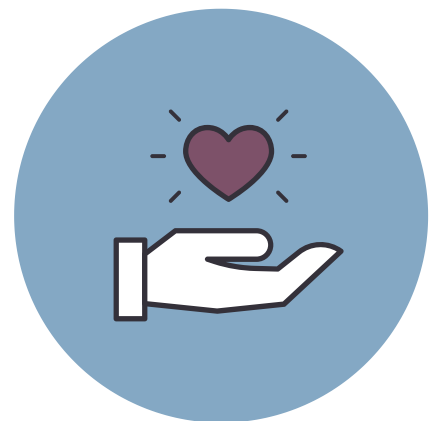
Other helpful sources of information:

- A tax accountant; or
- Your social worker.

IF YOU'RE NOT ABLE TO ACCESS GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

We know some of our members are unable to access Australian Government financial support, due to visa or residency status. If you are experiencing financial hardship and don't have access to Australian benefits, contact one of our team to discuss:

- Emergency relief one-off support
- Positive Women Victoria food voucher program
- Referral to other services
- Legal services that may be able to provide you with specific information about your residency or visa status during this time; or
- Special impacts: housing support.



YOUR MEDICATION: ACCESS PROBLEMS OR FINANCIAL WORRIES?

Looking after yourself means it's important to keep taking your HIV medication.

Your GP or doctor will ensure you are able to get your HIV medication as normal during this time. Medications can be posted out and health consultations may be offered online.

Please contact Positive Women Victoria if you are struggling to meet medication expenses and costs, such as your co-payments.

If you have other problems with accessing medication during this time (e.g. you are not a permanent resident) contact us for referral to assistance and programs for medication access.

YOUR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

It's a stressful time, and you may want a bit of support to help you through. Remember, PWV can take your call or respond to your questions, but you may also find the following support options helpful.

[Beyond Blue](#) (general tips and information about looking after yourself and your wellbeing emotionally during this time)

[Thorne Harbour Health](#) (HIV counselling online)

[Living Positive Victoria](#) (Peer Navigation team)

