

A Statement on COVID-19 - Asylum Seeker Resource Centre

The below is a statement from the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC) in relation to the rapidly escalating COVID-19 crisis that is caused by novel coronavirus.

Right now, our organisation exists in a period of turbulence and uncertainty unprecedented in modern times. Like many reacting to this unfolding situation, we have been shocked at the escalation of this crisis – the pace, the volume and the uncertainty it is creating.

Our thoughts are with each of you and your loved ones during this time.

During these uncertain times, now more than ever we must come together as a united community to help and support each other through this crisis.

Long before COVID-19, the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre existed to support people seeking asylum and refugees to survive, thrive and rebuild their lives through a range of aid and advocacy services. We did this hand in hand with our expert workforce (staff and a cohort of more than 1200 incredible volunteers), supported by a generous community of donors, funders, activists and community organisers.

And right now, this hasn't changed. We'll continue to support those seeking asylum in Australia, today, tomorrow and into the future.

That's because people seeking asylum are some of the most vulnerable in our community – many do not have a safety net, access to Medicare, Centrelink or critical care services.

Without support they are exposed to the worst economic and health impacts of the pandemic and in the coming weeks and months ahead, will feel it the most.

We recognise that our ASRC members have lived experience of living in uncertain times and this may be retraumatizing for some of them. And that we are strongly committed to delivering programs and services that will help them cope for as long as we practically can so they too can come through stronger and more resilient.

The reality however, is that it's not business as usual and we're acutely aware that our model of service delivery will undoubtedly change – in fact, it already has, as members of our community balance their personal and professional lives. That's why we're monitoring the situation daily and will make decisions for our ways of working in the best interests of all our people and to ensure they are supported.

These decisions are made by the Executive Leadership Team of the ASRC, in conjunction with subject matter experts, and the Board.

It's also why we have strong protocols and procedures in place to respond to the ever-changing nature of this crisis, including planning documents and readily available information that is communication with our staff, volunteers and people seeking asylum who access our services.

Right now, what doesn't change is our commitment to maintain the health and wellbeing of those we support as well as our workforce as our number one priority.

Working within the guidelines set out by the Department of Health, we continue to evolve our procedures in relation to service delivery, mitigation strategies and general health awareness. Our aim is to ensure that we can continue to provide high quality services, for as long as possible, in light of ongoing changes to our volunteer and staff workforce, and the capacity of our community to continue supporting our work.

The emerging crisis, particularly the nature of panic buying, is already having a significant impact on our organisation and our ability to deliver food relief to our members through our Foodbank. Currently, we are struggling to fulfill long standing wholesale orders due to availability, generous online orders through major supermarket chains are no longer available and naturally, as people's circumstances change, so does their ability to support us.

That's why it's never been more important to stand with people seeking asylum and with the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre in whatever way you can. We need you now, but we'll also need you in the months ahead, so that we may continue to support people who seek safety and a chance to rebuild their lives.

We recognise these are challenging times and we're grateful for the powerful movement you continue to be a part of, with people seeking asylum.

Over the coming weeks and months ahead, the ASRC will continue to be led by our values in decision making, providing compassion, respect and dignity in all that we do. And we'll continue to update you across Facebook, website and email as things change.

Thank you for standing with us, and most importantly, with people seeking asylum. We ask that you remain conscious of the huge challenges facing people seeking asylum during these uncertain times.

Wishing you and your loved one's health and happiness.

The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre