

Statement on Public Housing lockdown

Community sector workers hold a wealth of expertise supporting and working with those most vulnerable in our communities. They are social and community workers with expertise in mental health, family violence, alcohol and other drug, aged care, migrant and refugee, children's support and more. This meeting of ASU members condemns the law and order response put in place at the North Melbourne and Flemington high rises, versus a health and social services response. The experience of community sector workers is that a police presence hinders rather than helps effective community work responses, creating fear, distrust and a barrier to seeking support and services. A hard job is made even harder for ASU members doing their job when clients don't trust police. They are less likely to engage and it should be professional and skilled community workers, in conjunction with nurses and infection control workers who are already working in these communities that continue to do so.

This meeting of ASU members demands:

1. No to racism, and yes to a culturally sensitive healthcare response, not a policing response
2. Free hand sanitizer, PPE and supplies to all public housing with communal facilities and amenities
3. Police off the estates – lockdowns are a health issue not a criminal issue
4. Support for residents to be in stage four lockdown instead of a hard lockdown
5. Mass testing with test results returned in 24 hrs
6. Job guarantees and paid Covid-19 leave for all residents
7. Extend the rent-freeze for public housing residents
8. State government guarantee to improve and expand current public housing stock
9. Improved maintenance of amenities and facilities (ie lifts, laundry facilities etc)
10. Improved cleanliness of shared facilities and amenities at the flats including ongoing deep cleaning in line with sanitising to prevent spread of virus. (ie laundry, lift, rubbish chutes, stairwells)
11. Improved consultation to occur with the ASU, community leaders and professionals – before change happens
12. Accessible messages through: community languages, age appropriate for children, translators, wifi, mobiles etc
13. The right person providing the right services (not volunteers, professional staff to be trained and briefed)
14. Condemnation of the punitive response of putting hundreds of police in the flats with no warning. ASU members report this to be extremely re-traumatising and inappropriate considering some instances of proven police violence with the communities living there.
15. Urgent provision of supplies for alcohol and other drug withdrawal, and provision of pharmacotherapy supports
16. Appropriate family violence perpetrator intervention – integrated with risk assessments by Family Violence professionals.
17. Solidarity and support with residents current demands, and acknowledge the extremely negative impact of policing - who are often perpetrators of violence.

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