



## Inclusion Australia and VALID

### Media Release

Friday 7 August 2020

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## **Act now to keep people with disability safe: alarm at the extent of COVID-19 infections in Victoria's disability group homes.**

**People with disability, especially people with intellectual disability, living in Victorian disability group homes are concerned they are being exposed to a high risk of contracting coronavirus due to unresolved workforce issues requiring government action.**

Inclusion Australia and VALID are alarmed to learn of the extent of COVID-19 infections in Victoria's disability group homes and call on all levels of government to urgently address the workforce issues that put people with intellectual disability living in group homes at risk of infection and death. This includes delivering on a surge workforce, rapid resourcing of clinical advice and infection control measures, and guaranteed pay and conditions across the sector.

Disability group homes are houses in the community where groups of people with disability – primarily people with intellectual disability – live. The people in group homes receive daily support from support workers who are often casual workers who provide support to multiple homes, who typically have only received minimal, if any, formal infection control training, and many of whom work across the aged care and disability sector.

Recently released figures show that there are currently 24 cases of resident infection, and 47 staff have tested positive across 37 service sites. IA and VALID understand that two COVID-19 related deaths have occurred in disability services in the past few months, and we have also been informed unofficially of the death of an NDIS participant this week. These figures underscore the need for urgent action to prevent a major outbreak in Victoria's disability group homes, and the need for governments around Australia to heed the lessons and support our call for urgent action.

Our understanding is that the majority of resident infections have occurred across two sites – the ARUMA group home in Pascoe Vale, in which 10 infections have been recorded, and a Respite Services Australia group home house in Moonee Ponds which is now linked to at least 30 cases. The NDIS Commission has also now confirmed that 42 Victorian NDIS participants and 78 workers have tested positive since March.

We remain confident that disability services and governments are working diligently to prevent a potential further spread of COVID-19 in group homes. However, we are deeply concerned that workforce capacity remains the major risk to people with intellectual disability who rely on staff support 24/7. Increased workforce casualisation has forced many disability support staff to work multiple jobs, sometimes across disability and aged care.

**Quotes attributable to Catherine McAlpine, CEO, Inclusion Australia:**

*“Inclusion Australia urges governments to take immediate steps to protect people with intellectual disabilities living in group homes.”*

*“Governments must provide the resourcing and direct payments to the disability workforce as it has for aged care workers. Workers must not be forced to make impossible choices between keeping the people they support safe or feeding their own families.”*

*“Governments and disability services around Australia must learn from the situation in Victoria and take immediate action so they are prepared. Taking action to ensure the workforce is trained in infection control, and a plan to provide access to financial supports to casual workers is needed now.”*

**Quotes attributable to Kevin Stone, CEO, VALID and Chair, Inclusion Australia:**

*“Governments must act now to prevent further outbreaks in Victoria’s disability group homes. People with intellectual disabilities, their families and support staff are terrified.*

*Disability support staff are working on the frontline of preventing and responding to COVID-19 infections in group homes. People with intellectual disabilities need to know that the disability workforce will be resourced and paid properly to do the high risk work necessary to keep them safe. They need to know their support staff are well-trained in all aspects of infection control, including the proper use of PPE and masks. They need to know their staff aren’t having to risk working across multiple sites simply to maintain an adequate income. These measures must be acted on immediately.”*

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***Inclusion Australia is the national peak body for intellectual disability.  
VALID is the Victoria’s peak advocacy organisation for adults with intellectual disability and their families.***