



Term 4, ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body

Dear Community members

As we are heading into the Easter period, on behalf of all elected body members I would like to wish you a happy, safe and healthy Easter weekend. This weekend more than most will be particularly difficult given the social distancing and current laws in place in terms of non-essential travel. Therefore, we encourage all of you to take the time to spend quality time with each other, appreciate those we have in our lives and keep each other safe and healthy. The information in the following sections are provided from ACT Directorates with responsibility for the services.

ACT Health – Flu Vaccinations available now

The best way for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to access the flu vaccination is through Winnunga, your normal GP or a healthcare provider.

At risk groups are people over 50, children under 5 years, people with pre-existing medical conditions and pregnant women. In addition to attending your doctor, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from 6 months to 5 years can access the flu vaccine through the Early Childhood Immunisation Centres at no cost.

Letters are being prepared from the Chief Health Officer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community groups to encourage individuals and families to get immunised.

Please note that getting the flu vaccination will not protect you from the COVID-19 outbreak, therefore it is important to follow social distancing and personal hygiene practices at all times.

If you have any further questions in regard to the flu vaccination, please call the Immunisation Unit of Health Protection Services on 51249800.

Education Directorate

Since Tuesday 24 March 2020 all ACT Public Schools have been pupil free until the school holidays, due to begin on Friday 10 April 2020. Pupil free days are enabling ACT public schools to prepare the transition to new ways of delivering education to all ACT children. Teachers have been focusing on developing resources and supports for children to access online learning from home.

Schools have continued to provide learning to students whose parents and carers cannot keep them at home for work or other reasons. The message from our Directorate and schools has been clear - no child will be turned away if they need to be at school. However, if a child is unwell they should not attend school.

Relationships are key to education and it is ideal if parents and students can remain connected to their teachers and schools. Schools have been reaching out to students and families during this pupil free period and will continue to reach out to discuss learning plans for Term 2 as we transition to alternative methods of education.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit and associated staff such as IEOs (Indigenous Education Officers) are and will continue to be working with our students and families. The Unit is developing a suite of supports, and further information will be released soon. Feedback and advice from the community is valued.

The need for provision of internet access was identified early in the COVID-19 response and the Directorate is working to provide internet access to enable students to continue to access online learning, assessment and support. This also extends to access to Chromebooks for online learning (existing policy for all ACT students from Year 7 onwards) for students in years 4, 5 and 6 who need a device. We are asking families to contact their school if they need to arrange access to a device.

We are ensuring that we have arrangement in place to meet the needs of our vulnerable students and families. We will continue to work with government and

community agencies to make sure we offer the best support and education for all children in Canberra.

From Term 2 – beginning Tuesday 28 April

During the Learning from Home period in Term 2, there will be a focus on wellbeing in an effort to ensure all students have resources to keep them safe, connected and supported. This is fundamental to the ability to learn and therefore a priority for the Education Directorate.

For some students and families, additional care and consideration may be needed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The reasons for this are many: increased stress, vulnerability and risk caused by a range of factors including sudden changes to usual sources of support and respite; economic circumstances; increased demands of employment and caring roles; more people present in the home environment. That is why we have set up a range of supports that can be provided online from the school or through our Network Student Engagement Team (which will have our IEOs and Cultural Integrity Coordinators as part of the team).

Student Wellbeing Check-ins for all students

During this period, all students will have regular check-ins from their education setting. Educators will provide both real time interactions and pre-prepared content for students through online platforms. All students will be expected to interact with their Learning from Home program at least once a day. Teachers will check-in with a student in a variety of ways, this may include via video-conferencing, participation in a chat via Google Classroom and checking the student's online presence through the designated online platform.

More Frequent Check-Ins for some students

As schools are transitioning to learning from home, many will have identified students who may require more frequent check-ins. Additionally, the Directorate will assist schools to check they have identified students who need additional care and consideration through system data, collaboration with other parts of government and community organisations and through the important and trusted relationship that students and families already have with their schools and with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education based in the Directorate.

Support for Schools

The Directorate will assist schools to consider a continuum of support to identify and support members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school community needing additional care and consideration during the COVID-19 pandemic, recognising that staff have a strong desire to support their school community, while looking after their own safety and wellbeing. Schools will

also receive guidance on procedures for connecting and checking-in with families. This might involve connecting the family with a service or community organisation or referring the student to support services provided by the Directorate. This will depend on the student and family's needs as time goes by.

For children who cannot stay home, supervision will be provided at a small number of school sites. Good news is that those students who continue to attend a school site will be supervised while undertaking the same remote learning program as students at home. Supervision will be carried out by out of school hours care workers supported by a mix of teachers and allied health professionals. More information will be provided shortly about which public school sites will be available as safe and supervised environments.

Families who require safe and supervised care for their children at the start of term 2 should register their interest by completing a form that will be emailed to them by their school. It is important that you return this by Friday 17 April 2020 as this information will also help the Education Directorate to identify which school sites may be included.

Specialist Schools

All of the ACT public specialist schools will remain available as safe, supervised school sites. These sites will work closely with families to ensure they meet the highly individual needs of each student. The Muliyan Off Campus Flexible Learning Program will also continue to be available to students who need it.

Out of school hours care

Out of school hours care will be available at the designated school sites for families who need care before and after school hours. The Education Directorate is working with these service providers and more details will be available shortly.

ACT Policing

The COVID-19 situation is uncertain and rapidly changing. As a result, the Australian, State & Territory Governments are regularly adjusting their Health Directions and guidance. Listen to and watch the news to keep updated on the latest restrictions being put in place to stop the spread of COVID-19 and keep our community safe.

As well as news updates, the ACT Government has created a new helpline and website to inform and assist the ACT community through the challenges of COVID-19. The Helpline can be contacted on 02 6207 7244 between 8am and 8pm daily, and the website can be accessed anytime www.covid19.act.gov.au

As at 8 April 2020, all indoor and outdoor public gatherings, including large and family group gatherings, have been reduced to a maximum of two people. This also means that more than two visitors to a home is not permitted. The two visitors must also be able to practice social distancing, that is, they must be able to be 1.5 metres away from another person.

This law does not apply inside the household if:

- You need someone to enter and remain to provide you with medical care or medical supplies.
- There is an emergency situation.
- You need someone to enter and remain to provide you with necessary care and support.
- You need someone to enter and remain to carry out urgent and essential repairs to your premises.

This law does not apply outside if:

- You're out together with people you ordinarily live with.
- You need to attend a wedding where there is no more than 5 people and they are 2 arms lengths away from each other.
- You need to attend a funeral where there is no more than 10 people and they are 2 arms lengths away from each other.

All unnecessary travel should be avoided where possible. By staying home, and only going out when necessary you can help stop the spread of COVID-19. We understand that family and community are important, and isolating makes it hard to keep in contact, but by remaining at home wherever possible, you can help protect those vulnerable members in our community.

ACT Policing's response to COVID-19 directions remains a staged one – ACT Policing officers will educate, advise and encourage the community to voluntarily comply with the Health Directions; before moving to either warnings, fines or prosecution as a last resort. If ACT Policing suspects that you are not complying with the Health Directions, they will speak with you and may ask you for proof of identification.

Most people in our community are trying to do the right thing and ACT Policing's job is to help them do so. Where there are flagrant breaches, and people are committing serious offences, ACT Policing's members will take action. Individuals in the ACT can face an on-the-spot fine of \$1,000 for failing to comply with social distancing directions. If there are serious criminal offences attached to the behaviour, then ACT Policing can arrest those involved and place them before the Courts to stop the dangerous behaviour.

In the Canberra Times on 1 April 2020, the Chief Police Officer of the ACT was reported as saying: "In terms of enforcement, police would be focused primarily on educating Canberrans about the new rules. This could include police officers approaching people in public to speak with them about their behaviour. Our intention isn't to fine people or to drive enforcement ... that is an absolute last resort," he said. "But please know that if we see flagrant breaches of the law, we will act."

In addition to the public messaging, Chief Police Officer Johnson has sent an internal communique to all ACT Policing Officers; emphasising the need for police to educate, advise and encourage the community when interacting with them, and to use their considered judgement with people to motivate voluntary compliance.

Remember if you need advice or assistance regarding COVID-19, please contact the ACT Government Helpline on 02 62077244, between the hours of 8am and 8pm (7 days a week), or go to the ACT Government COVID-19 website www.covid19.act.gov.au.

We will back next week with further updates.

Katrina Fanning
Chairperson

ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body



PROVIDING A **STRONG**
RESPECTED & **DEMOCRATICALLY**
ELECTED VOICE FOR
ACT ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES