



Commissioner's Update

29 May 2020



By the circumstances we all find ourselves in through the COVID-19 pandemic, "In this Together" has a more profound meaning and context for the broader Aboriginal community, and moreso for our Aboriginal children and young people.

"In this Together" is a reminder that whilst the aim is to build relationships, respect and trust between the wider Australian community and Aboriginal peoples, and particularly an acceptance of this country's history, which has laid the veneer of Aboriginal social disadvantage, there needs to be a candid recognition of the fact that Aboriginal peoples are more likely to be affected by the adverse effects of COVID-19 at levels above and beyond the rest of Australia, mainly in areas of health, education, employment, housing and justice – in fact the adversity is amplified tenfold.

Our love of family, culture and togetherness are a source of our resilience and strength - these cultural qualities were initially seen as a posing threat to the spread of COVID-19; however at this time, it has proven to be key to preventing the spread.

As biosecurity enforcements in relation to COVID-19 continue in remote and regional areas, for many of our mob who already face poverty; the inequities are magnified. Aboriginal people already experience a high degree of socio-economic marginalisation, poor access to healthcare, overcrowded living conditions, significantly higher rates of communicable and non-communicable diseases and a lack of access to essential services. It is important that we all continue to keep good hygiene, wash our hands regularly, maintain appropriate social distancing and remain at home as far as possible apart from accessing essential needs.

The evidence indicates that the harmful effects of the pandemic is expected to be most damaging for children of impoverished backgrounds, and for those in already disadvantaged or vulnerable situations. We spare more than a thought on the grave threat that COVID-19 therefore poses to the future of Aboriginal children and young people's health, education and social support – their vulnerability and risk becoming exacerbated, owing to factors such as the young age profile of the Aboriginal population – we are like no other population group in this land, half of the Aboriginal population in South Australia is under the age of 18 years; and continue to be over-represented in youth justice, and care and protection system, fare poorly in education outcomes in comparison to other groups of children and young people.

How this state responds to the vulnerability of Aboriginal children and young people will be a measure of how it truly engages with, and enacts reconciliation.

Kind regards

April Lawrie
Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People