



Australian Jewish community management of COVID-19 pandemic

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Jewish community organisations and leaders across Australia have rallied together to manage the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Jewish institutions, families, individuals and, most especially, the elderly and vulnerable. The intense work done by the Jewish community roof bodies in each State, the Crisis Management Teams of the Community Security Groups, shules, the Day Schools, the aged care sector, the welfare sector and volunteers, all working in unison, has been nothing short of inspiring. We are deeply indebted to all of them. This is the Australian Jewish community at its finest, mobilising its talent and resources with unity of purpose and great skill for the common good.

Maintaining strict personal hygiene and social distancing are imperatives as defensive measures against the spread of the virus. Yet social distancing represents a special challenge for the Jewish community, with its strong and deep traditions of family and communal togetherness. Another challenge is that the Jewish community has a higher-than-average proportion of people aged 65 or more, the group most at risk if they are infected.

The Federal government has issued advice on social distancing practices: <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-information-on-social-distancing>. Given our physical closeness as a community and as families, and our age profile as a community, many experts are advising us to adopt even stricter, and more thorough, social distancing practices than those officially recommended. Keeping children physically separate from their grandparents, great-grandparents and other older relatives, and utilising only non-physical means of contact, is something many of us will find hard to do. Yet it may save the life of a loved one.

The following is a summary of the current status of Jewish community life in each State and Territory.

New South Wales

- NSW Jewish community has activated its Jewish Emergency Management Plan (JEMP) - the plan was finalised some years ago, primarily contemplating security crises which have been rehearsed, but also capable of handling other crisis scenarios – so far working well
 - JEMP is controlled by the Decision Makers Group (DMG) comprising senior leaders of NSWJBD, ECAJ, CJCS NSW, CSG NSW
 - JEMP is operated by the CSG NSW Crisis Management Team (CMT)
 - DMG has had numerous teleconference meetings with all shules, all schools, and other at risk such as aged care, hospital, museum). They are sharing information with each other and DMG using technology
- All shules have suspended services with at most 1 or 2 very minor exceptions
- 2 schools are transitioning to online learning now - others are continuing with face to face classes in line with government policy, but can enable online alternatives quickly
- All aged care and other at risk institutions appear to be at least in line with government recommendations, or ahead of them
- The Sydney Jewish Museum is temporarily closed
- DMG has established 2 sub-committees
 - A crisis medical sub-committee, which is looking at early assistance scenarios for aged and other vulnerable people in the community, both those in aged care facilities and at home for aged care and the elderly in the community. . The Wolper Hospital is central to the committee's functions, together with a number of highly qualified others
 - A financial sub-committee which is tasked with looking at the financial implications for the NSW Jewish community and its members as a result of the pandemic. This sub-committee is populated with relevant experts, including representation from JCA
- In general terms, community events have been postponed or cancelled – there are some small exceptions where low numbers are involved
 - No public Yom Hashoah event – scaled back version with limited numbers to be livestreamed
 - Yom Haatzmaut event is cancelled
 - NAJEX Anzac commemoration is cancelled.
- CSG NSW's JEMP website www.csognsw.org.au is designed to be a central source of NSW information. It continues to be updated. Email bulletins have also been issued.
- There is a strong spirit of unity and co-operation by all organisations
- CSG NSW professionals and volunteers are doing a great job - high praise.

Victoria

- Victoria JEMP activated and has established emergency committee comprising representatives of Jewish Community Council of Victoria, CSG Victoria, Jewish Community Crisis Management, Hatzolah, Council of Orthodox Synagogues Victoria, Rabbinical Council of Victoria, Progressive Judaism Victoria.

- Website established as source of community information - <https://vic.thecsg.org.au/covid-19-community-information/>
- Regular information bulletins being sent to community
- Most shules closed.
- Yeshivah Beth Rivkeh College closed by order
- Other schools open but Bialik, Mt Scopus and King David have announced they will be moving to online by learning the end of next week with Holidays from 6 to 20 April 2020. Other schools are expected to follow the same protocol
- Aged care – strict protocols in place for visits
- Elderly and infirm living alone – Committee in place to communicate services available.
- Jewish Care Victoria with support of Erdi Foundation is exploring offering financial assistance to those in need.
- AUJS Vic delivering food to people living alone.
- Yom Hashoah and Yom Hazikaron commemorations and Yom Haatzmaut celebrations cancelled, and replacement events to be live streamed.

Western Australia

- Shules: Temple David services will cease after this week's Shabbat service; MZH, Dianella Shule and PHC all closed; Chabad still going with very small numbers
- Schools: Carmel School - high school has had a one day trial online. School will only close when directed by WA State Government
- Aged care facilities and retirement villages: As per WA Govt Guidelines. Jewish Community Council of WA in discussions with institutions about having tighter restrictions on visiting, and need to have that monitored.
- Elderly and infirm living alone: Still getting lists of people in this category together. Menora Charity helping with this (WA version of Jewish Care)
- Community awareness about social distancing: Email newsletter was sent to everyone last Monday and other one will go out tomorrow. Updated report also in Maccabean newspaper and various face book pages together with use of individual organisations databases
- Cancellation of community events: Everything cancelled.

Queensland

- Brisbane Hebrew Congregation and Mishkan Israel (synagogue at the Jewish Communal Centre), Gold Coast Hebrew Congregation, Temple Shalom Gold Coast and Chabad Houses in Brisbane, Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast and Cairns have closed down service for the foreseeable future.
- Beit or V'Shalom Brisbane is also now closed.
- South Brisbane Hebrew Congregation has not decided to cancel any services or activities yet. QJBD President has spoken with Gary Goldman, their President. SBHC think their small numbers and health regime is enough at this time.

- Gan Gani Kindy and Sinai College are open and following all statutory and State Government guidelines.
- Many in Retirement Village are in self isolation for safety.
- All organisations have cancelled activities and meetings.
- Yom Hashoah and Yom Haatzmaut have all been cancelled as have the Seder nights.
- Yom HaShoah event of NSW Jewish Board of Deputies will be live streamed and/or shown via Youtube. Qld Jewish Board of Deputies may video its guest speaker as well and send that out to the community.
- The Qld Jewish Board of Deputies will be distributing Zachor Candles to individual homes prior to Yom HaShoah.
- JCareQld is organising people to help distribute food packs, support or help across various suburbs and regions in case it is needed. The various Chabad Houses are continuing their support of needy families.

ACT

- Have suspended or cancelled majority of events, including communal Seder, Community opening of new wing on 5 April decision on the Grand Opening ceremony of 12 May (to be officiated by the GG) will be made by 31 March; have cancelled Yom Hashoah and Limmud Shavuot.
- Jewish Care worker has 50 names and contact details of vulnerable people and checks in on a regular basis to assess their needs and level of support required. Jewish Care worker is coordinating with COA in Sydney to pick up frozen kosher meals and is coordinating OzHarvest deliveries to the Centre; Jewish Care, rabbi, volunteers have been in touch with elderly for delivery of meals, including kosher food, shopping, and phone and online social support
- Live-streaming of services – we are directing community members to the JBD Yom Hashoah live stream + we will ask Dr Deborah Mayerson (keynote speaker for our YH event) to make a recording of her speech and we'll send link to members.
- Chabad arrangements have been sought but are unknown.
- ACTJC Cheder (both Sunday and Tuesday) will continue while public schools remain open, review at end of school term in 2 weeks. Possible to move to virtual classroom.

South Australia

- Both synagogues have cancelled in-person services and events and will reconsider that decision monthly. Beit Shalom Progressive Synagogue will be conducting services and Torah study online when the technology is sorted.
- Cheder learning will be online from this Sunday.
- Our government-funded aged care service, Jewish Community Services, continues to provide critical support to older people in their homes. It is conducting health surveys before caring staff enter a home. It is currently considering whether it will continue to provide group classes. It will continue to deliver food to clients. Both synagogues are also working to ensure more isolated community members have access to needed supplies.

- Social distancing has been practiced for some time at Jewish venues but will no longer be relevant as venues close.
- In person events such as the communal Seder are cancelled. The State Zionist Council is considering how to host Yom HaShoah via streaming.

Tasmania

- Hobart Synagogue closes after this Shabbat service. No services, events or tours.
- Chabad will no longer have services at the Launceston Synagogue. This was based on the advice of Rabbi Ulman of the Sydney Beth Din.
- The 175th anniversary of the Hobart Synagogue event will not occur as scheduled in July. We will announce a new date when crisis is over.
- We are in touch with the elderly members of the community and will support as needed.
- We are in the process of establishing a cheder here for the first time in decades, but this is on hold until after the crisis.

At this difficult time, please listen carefully to expert advice, especially about the necessity of strict social distancing. Please keep safe and keep those around you safe, by exercising every precaution.

We can be proud of the way our community has come together to look after each other. The ECAJ has received a wonderful response to our national e-mail calling for volunteers to assist the most isolated and vulnerable members of our community.

We will post regular updates.

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