

Preparing for the future

Learning from the impacts of the COVID-19 response on older people, people with disability and carers in NSW

Report snapshot



Background

The NSW Ageing and Disability Advisory Board provides advice to the Ageing and Disability Commissioner on matters relating to abuse, neglect and exploitation of adults with disability and older people.

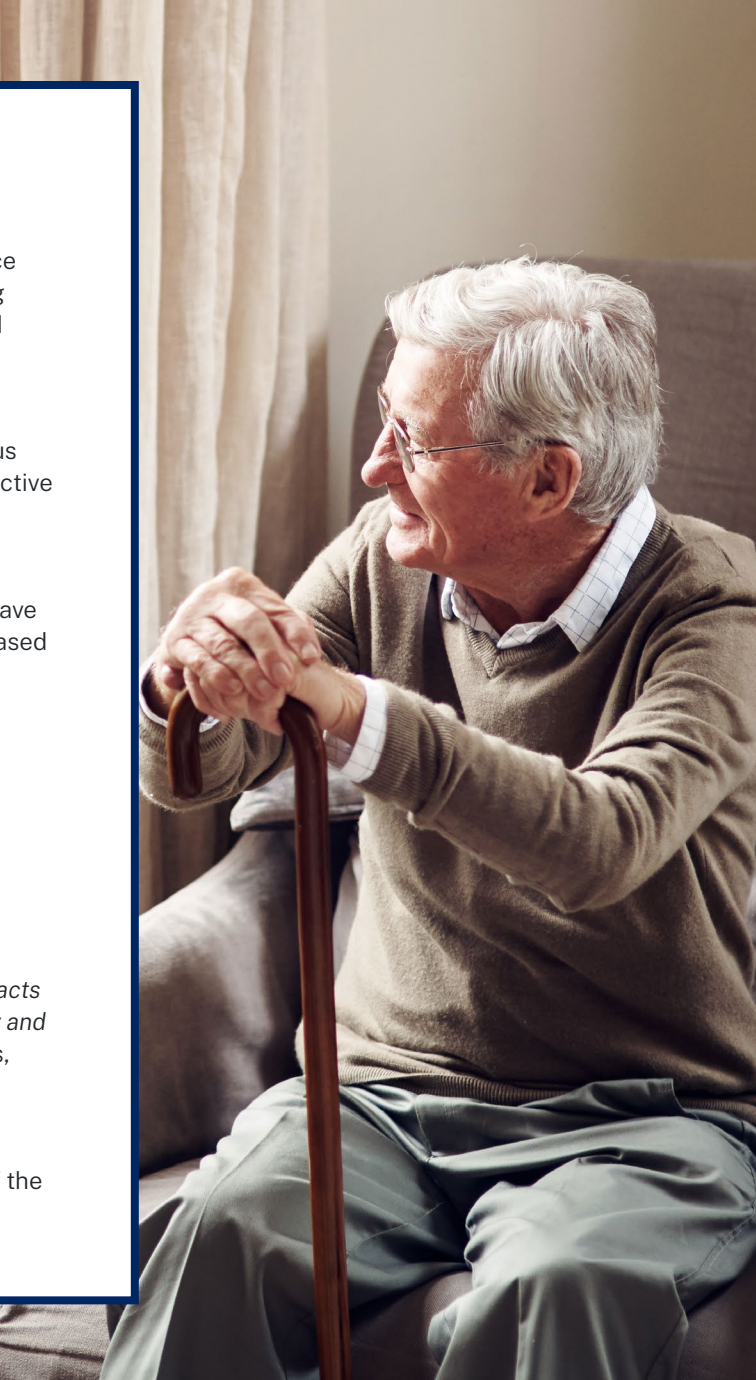
COVID-19 has had significant impacts on all NSW residents. Some of the impacts have been direct – resulting from the virus itself; and others have been indirect – resulting from the protective measures put in place by governments, communities and households to reduce the spread and severity of the virus.

Many older people, people with disability and carers in NSW have experienced greater and additional impacts due to their increased susceptibility and exposure to the virus, and their higher than average reliance on services and support networks that were disrupted by protective measures.

To assist discussions with the NSW Government, Carers NSW prepared a paper on behalf of the Advisory Board that drew together the public evidence on the impact of the COVID-19 response in NSW on older people, people with disability and carers.

The final paper, *Preparing for the future: Learning from the impacts of the COVID-19 response on older people, people with disability and carers in NSW*, looks at the experiences of these target groups, and highlights issues to be addressed and opportunities to improve planning for future pandemics.

This snapshot document provides a quick overview of some of the key information in the paper.



Key impacts

There were particular impacts on older people, people with disability and carers associated with:

- mandated or self-imposed social isolation, with mental health impacts
- confusion and difficulties working out where and how to get accessible and accurate information and support
- difficulties accessing necessary supports and services due to restrictions, staff shortages, and service closures
- distress and anxiety associated with poor messaging about the value of older people and people with disability, and insufficient recognition of their experiences
- increased risk of abuse, neglect and exploitation, at the same time that there was reduced in-person support, limiting oversight and the ability to raise concerns and get help.



Positive steps and opportunities

There were also positive steps taken in NSW as part of the pandemic response, including:

- consultative and information sharing mechanisms that were set up by key government agencies, such as NSW Health's COVID-19 Disability Community of Practice
- flexibility that was provided in grant funding that enabled grassroots networks to be developed and mobilised to coordinate localised support initiatives, including streamlined information and advice on accessing support services
- new and expanded funding opportunities that were provided to support frontline service delivery, including to combat social isolation for seniors, and to support homelessness and domestic violence services
- agreed arrangements that were developed to ensure a coordinated whole-of-government approach to the joint management of COVID outbreaks in residential aged care in NSW.

Areas for proposed actions in NSW

The paper identifies areas for proposed action in NSW to:

- **improve planning, consultation and leadership** – including to establish crisis protocols that trigger an integrated care sector response; and embed requirements to consult with bodies representing older people, people with disability and carers
- **enhance information and messaging** – including to centralise and simplify official information sources and channels; embed accessibility and inclusive language requirements in communications; and support community outreach initiatives to ensure at-risk and hard to reach communities are aware of the services available to them
- **improve access to services and support** – including measures to manage priority access of at-risk groups to essential services during crisis periods; and expand digital literacy and access to older people, people with disability and carers
- **enhance mental and physical health** – including measures to enable isolated people to remain connected; maintain community 'safe spaces' for older people, people with disability and carers; and prioritise programs to help re-establish social connection as restrictions ease.