



# Combatting Social Isolation for Seniors during COVID-19 Program Guidelines

April 2020



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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Combatting Social Isolation for Seniors during COVID-19 Grant Program

Due to the potential impact of COVID-19 on seniors throughout the state, the NSW Government's Combatting Social Isolation for Seniors during COVID-19 Grant Program (Combatting Social Isolation) provides one-off funding opportunities for organisations across NSW to develop projects that will reduce social isolation for seniors aged 65 years and over, or 55 years and over for Aboriginal people.

This grant program aims to combat social isolation for seniors during the COVID-19 isolation and social distancing (reducing close physical proximity with others) emergency measures through one-off grants for organisations to provide quality social connection opportunities for seniors. The target cohort for this grant is seniors who are socially isolated or at risk of isolation or loneliness.

The program seeks to support projects, both online and not-online (for those who do not have online access or capability) that will engage seniors and enable them to connect with others during this period to reduce social isolation or loneliness. You will be asked to explain in your grant application how your proposed project meets this funding objective.

## 1.2 Background

COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation on 11 March 2020, with more than 118,000 cases in 114 countries.

Because the risk of death from COVID-19 increases with age, family members and friends are limiting their visits to seniors, whether they are in aged care facilities, assisted living facilities or their own homes. The practice of social distancing is already being shown to result in an increase in social isolation and loneliness among seniors.

Further, following National Cabinet advice that all senior Australians over the age of 70 (and those over the age of 65 with chronic conditions) should stay at home and self-isolate, the need to for seniors to stay connected via other modes of communication is critical to their social and mental wellbeing.

In light of the impact of COVID-19 on seniors, particularly their ability and desire to socialise face-to-face, the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) has reassessed the suitability of the newly-launched Seniors Staying Social grant program. This grant program will replace Seniors Staying Social and focus on short term projects to support seniors in social isolation during COVID-19.

This program is a one-off grant program to address the urgent challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis, particularly in relation to the health, and emotional and mental wellbeing of seniors.

Social isolation is seen as the objective state of having minimal contact and interaction with others. Living alone is considered a risk factor to social isolation. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, one in five older Australians, including one in four seniors living alone, are considered to be socially isolated.<sup>1</sup>

Seniors are at an increased risk of social isolation due to a number of environmental factors, primarily the loss of physical or mental capacity, or the loss of friends and family members.<sup>2</sup> Social isolation can affect physical and mental health and wellbeing, and research has found that social isolation is associated with increased mortality, poorer health behaviours (smoking and physical inactivity), and biological effects (high blood pressure and inflammation).<sup>3</sup>

Conversely, social connections have been shown to improve physical and mental health and wellbeing, and strong ties with family, friends and the community provide people with happiness, security, support and a sense of purpose. Research shows that being connected to others is important for mental wellbeing and can be a protective factor against anxiety and depression.<sup>4</sup>

The NSW Government is committed to combatting social isolation among Seniors in this state, and addressing the social and health issues faced by those at risk. The primary objective of Priority 5 of the NSW Ageing Strategy 2016–2020 is that ‘Seniors in NSW stay connected and contribute to their communities.’<sup>5</sup>

Loneliness is a growing concern among our ageing population. Some seniors also experience social isolation, especially older men, some people from CALD backgrounds, LGBTI people, carers, seniors living in rural areas, and people in residential care. Some seniors who have lost a partner and live alone can go days without any human contact.

NSW Ageing Strategy 2016–2020

Seniors in particular groups are more vulnerable to social isolation and loneliness, particularly during COVID 19. The NSW Ageing Strategy acknowledges the need to focus on seniors from marginalised communities, including:

- rural, regional and remote areas

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australia’s welfare 2017, Australia’s welfare series no. 13. AUS 214. Canberra: AIHW 2017

<sup>2</sup> WHO 2016. Elder abuse: fact sheet. Geneva: WHO

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Beyond Blue (2018) Connections Matter: Helping Seniors stay socially active, p.2

<sup>5</sup> NSW Ageing Strategy 2016–2020, p.32–33

- Aboriginal people aged 55 years and over
- Seniors from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds
- Seniors who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex or Queer (LGBTIQ)
- Seniors with disability or living with dementia or chronic disease
- Seniors who are carers.

The World Health Organisation identified programs that provide activities of interest to seniors to be an effective method of combatting social isolation,<sup>6</sup> by providing an ongoing reason for seniors to meet with others and allowing, in many cases, for members to create their own social networks outside organised programs.

Australian and international research has identified that seniors feel socially connected primarily in the area in which they live. While there are many ways and means to maintain connections with friends and family, local community participation has been shown to be important.<sup>7</sup>

During the time of COVID-19, increased risk to seniors from the spread and contraction of the virus presents significant challenges in providing seniors with social connectedness while remaining physically isolated and confined indoors to remain safe and healthy.

Socialising online has been demonstrated to allow people with similar interests to find one another in spite of geography and individual mobility limitations, and in online projects there are often economies of scale not available to face-to-face group activities.

An evaluation of social connectedness programs conducted by Beyond Blue in 2014 found positive impacts from online initiatives, including reduced loneliness and the ability to access hard to reach or isolated groups.<sup>8</sup>

The absence of the element of face-to-face engagement demands innovative and effective approaches to 'remote' social engagement programs, bearing in mind and addressing the additional challenges for seniors who are not technically literate, have limited communication skills, or do not have access to the technological infrastructures (internet, computers or tablets, smartphone devices) to participate in online programs.

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<sup>6</sup> World Health Organisation (2015) World report on ageing and health, p.174

<sup>7</sup> Department of Health and Human Services Victoria (2017) Strengthening Seniors Inclusion and Participation (SSIP) in Local Communities: Evaluation Report, p.4

<sup>8</sup> Roberts Evaluation Pty Ltd (2014) Social Connectedness Research Project Final Report: prepared for beyondblue

## 2 Combatting Social Isolation for Seniors during COVID-19 Grants

### 2.1 What are the program's objectives and priorities?

The Combatting Social Isolation For Seniors during COVID-19 Grant Program aims to combat social isolation during COVID-19 for seniors aged 65 years and over, or 55 years and over for Aboriginal people, through one-off grants for organisations to provide engagement opportunities for seniors during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The primary target cohort for this grant is seniors who are currently socially isolated or at risk of isolation in their own home, retirement village or aged care facility.

This program seeks to support projects that help seniors connect and engage with others through online engagement or other forms of engagement (for those who do not have online access or capability) to reduce social isolation and loneliness.

We are looking to support initiatives that are:

- effective in addressing social isolation for seniors and providing social connection opportunities for them while mitigating the risks from COVID-19
- able to actively attract participation from seniors who are considered to be socially isolated or at risk of social isolation and have on the ground impact for seniors (not passive engagement)
- to be up and running immediately, or in a very short timeframe, through the extension of current capacity, systems and networks
- have a wide geographic spread, regionally or locally focused, community driven and delivered locally or online
- able to demonstrate business continuity planning to keep the project running until the end of 2020 should the provider's operations be directly affected by COVID-19
- value for money in terms of overall costs and the outcomes and benefits that will be delivered.

**Delivery approaches:** grants are open to organisations that will deliver programs through online or other approaches that can be actioned and sustained through the COVID-19 social distancing period and through to the end of 2020.

### 2.2 How much funding is available?

A funding pool of \$600,000 will be open for distribution in one-off grants ranging from \$10,000 to \$100,000 to eligible and successful applicants across NSW.

These grants will be for the delivery of projects or activities that provide opportunities for seniors aged 65 years and over, and 55 years and over for Aboriginal people, who are socially isolated or at risk of social isolation, to engage with others online or through other forms of engagement (for those who do not have online access or capability) during this period to reduce social isolation and loneliness.

## 2.3 Who can apply?

Applicants must be a legally constituted Australian-based entity. Individuals cannot apply.

Organisations based outside NSW are not eligible to apply unless they can demonstrate that core business already includes program or service delivery in NSW, and they are able to deliver the project within NSW with the funding provided. Such organisations must also meet all NSW regulatory and business requirements. Applications will not be accepted from organisations that have outstanding acquittals due to DCJ.

Organisations submitting proposals that involve partnerships need to nominate a project lead that will apply on behalf of the partnership. The project lead will have a contractual relationship with DCJ for the project and be responsible for ensuring there are effective governance relationships and communication channels with all partners.

# 3 What kind of projects can you apply for?

## 3.1 What are we looking for?

Successful applications will be for projects that demonstrate they are:

- effective in addressing social isolation for seniors aged 65 years and over, and 55 years and over for Aboriginal people, and able to engage with others during this period to reduce social isolation and loneliness, in compliance with COVID-19 isolation and social distancing measures
- able to attract and sustain participation from seniors who are considered to be socially isolated or at risk of social isolation and loneliness at least through to the end of 2020, using an active and not passive approach
- able to be up and running immediately, or in a very short timeframe, through the extension of current capacity, system and networks.
- have a wide geographic spread, regionally or locally focused, community driven and delivered locally or online
- able to demonstrate business continuity planning to keep the project running up to the end of 2020 should the provider's operations be directly affected by COVID-19

- value for money in terms of overall costs and the outcomes and benefits that will be delivered.

Proposals must demonstrate:

- how the project will actively engage seniors during this period of home isolation to reduce social isolation and loneliness
- what you plan to use the grant funding for and why you need the grant to deliver the project
- how you will measure the success of the project.

Evaluation of the funded projects will be critical in determining the success and potential further development of the program. Therefore, outcomes will need to be identified in the application for the project.

The following are examples of projects that may be delivered under each of the delivery approaches outlined at 2.1.

- a regional service provider starts a program of social support calls to isolated seniors and trains and engages volunteers, including language speakers for seniors from CALD backgrounds, to make phone calls to them
- a yarning group in the Aboriginal community seeks funding to create and run regular yarning conference calls to seniors who are house bound
- the approach of the Men's Shed movement is modelled online to recreate the atmospheres of an actual man's shed (for older men) and a women's 'fix-it' café (for older women) – offering a safe and supportive space where more seniors, including women, can feel confident to discuss and exchange information, as well as socialise, learn and share skills
- a carers support group with an active virtual communications channel for seniors launches a new forum and resources, including telephone dial-in access to the forum for Mandarin speakers in partnership with a state-wide CALD organisation.
- an LGBTIQ organisation creates and promotes an online application that helps LGBTIQ seniors to find others with interests in participating in an online book club or toastmasters-style forum, in partnership with a library providing access to e-books.

### 3.2 What are we not looking for?

Projects that will not be considered for funding or not be considered favourably include:

- projects that do not address social isolation and loneliness for seniors while mitigating COVID-19 risks
- projects involving or focused on research or community consultation

- projects that do not extend participation beyond the applicant organisation's immediate membership or service group
- projects or activities that require participants to pay more than a nominal amount to participate (any cost to participants should consider the resulting benefits for each participant, and their capacity to pay).
- requests for retrospective funding for projects that have started or have been completed
- projects/events that are run for commercial purposes or benefit
- projects that include fundraising events designed specifically for the purpose of fundraising for charities or for the organisation
- projects that have a long lead time to be established.

### 3.3 What can the funds be used for?

Funds can only be used for expenses directly related to the delivery of your project. You are required to clearly outline your proposed expenditure in the budget you submit with your application. The funds from a grant can be used for project-specific purposes, including:

- skills development (e.g. volunteer training)
- communications
- project coordination and facilitation.

### 3.4 What can't the funds be used for?

Items or activities that funding cannot be used for include:

Restricted item	Details
Wages and salaries	You cannot use funds to pay a staff member the salary or wages (in part or in full) they would normally be paid. Staff contributions to the project are expected to be provided in-kind by your organisation or partner where relevant.
Conferences/workshops	You cannot use funds to organise/hold a conference or workshops, or to pay for an individual or group to attend a conference. For the purposes of these guidelines, a conference or workshop is a meeting of a group of people primarily for the purposes of discussing and sharing information on a particular subject or project.
General equipment	For example, permanent equipment purchases that cannot be shown to directly facilitate the participation of seniors in the project, such as items not specific to the project.
Capital works	Such as the costs of repairs, maintenance, or renovation to, or purchase of, buildings or any form of capital works.

Restricted item	Details
Purchase of a vehicle or associated costs	
Non-essential costs	For example, costs that are not essential or not related to the proposed project activity.
Retrospective costs	For activities that have already taken place or costs incurred prior to the date the successful projects are announced.
Interstate or overseas travel costs	Such as the cost of travelling interstate or overseas to attend a conference or event.
Ongoing operational costs or activities and programs that are business as usual	You cannot use funds for your usual organisational functions, programs, or activities, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ongoing salaries, rent, utility costs</li> <li>• organisational costs for the delivery of ongoing services</li> <li>• increased capacity or staffing</li> <li>• training for ongoing service delivery.</li> </ul>
Existing debt or budget deficits	You cannot use funds to cover existing debt or budget deficits.

If some of the expenses listed above form part of a project's costs, they can only be included in the project budget as a contribution from the applicant and/or or partner organisations. Funding from the Combatting Social Isolation Grant Program cannot be requested or used for these.

## 4 The application process

### 4.1 How do you apply?

Applications will open 3 April 2020 and will close 11.59pm on 21 April 2020.

To apply for a Combatting Social Isolation Grant, please visit

<https://nswcommunities.smartygrants.com.au/CombattingSocialIsolation>

The application, letter of agreement and acquittal for the grants will be managed using the SmartyGrants management system created by the Australian Institute of Grants Management. You will receive an automated response from SmartyGrants once your application has been submitted. All applications then proceed through the assessment process outlined in 4.3 below.

Please do not email additional attachments such as support letters or references – only your response to the application form will be used to assess your application.

Applications that are late or incorrectly filled out or incomplete will not be accepted.

## 4.2 What is the timetable?

Date	Event
3 April 2020	Grant applications open
21 April 2020	Grant applications close
22–24 April 2020	Assessment of grant applications by Department of Communities and Justice, and Assessment Panel
Early May 2020	Notice and feedback to all applicants and public announcement of grant recipients by Minister for Seniors (at which point successful applicants can make their own announcements)
Mid-May 2020	Contracting with successful applicants and project payment
Mid-May 2020	Project implementation period commences
Mid-January 2021	Report and Financial Acquittal due to Department of Communities and Justice

## 4.3 How are applications assessed?

Applications will initially be assessed by DCJ to ensure eligibility and compliance with guidelines.

As this is a competitive grants round, all components of your application will be competitively assessed on their merits against the assessment criteria.

The assessment panel will comprise, but is not limited to, representatives from relevant units within DCJ.

Only responses submitted by applicants to the application form will be used to assess an application. The panel will not read anything that is not relevant to your application. Additional attachments such as support letters or references that are sent via email will not be accepted or considered in the assessment of the application unless expressly requested by DCJ.

The Ageing Policy and Implementation Unit in DCJ will process and consider the final assessment scores and comments with reference to the assessment criteria, demographics, and the distribution, range and scale of recommended applicants. This may include prioritising projects that focus on the priority groups or factors, geographical areas or time to commencement.

Final recommendations will be submitted for the consideration of the Minister for Seniors.

This means your application may be funded in full or not at all based on eligibility, compliance with the guidelines, the merits of the application, and the demand for funding from this grant program.

The following criteria will be applied to applications.

Criteria	All Grants
<b>Relevance</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The application puts forward a proposal that is consistent with the objectives of the grant program.</li> </ul>	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The application identifies and demonstrates an understanding of the needs of groups that will be targeted for the project and how they will be actively engaged to participate in the project.</li> </ul>	✓
<b>Impact</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The application demonstrates how the project will deliver tangible, positive and clearly articulated outcomes that meet the objectives of the grant program and identifies what the outcomes will be.</li> </ul>	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The applicant explains how it will measure and demonstrate to DCJ the success of the project.</li> </ul>	✓
<b>Implementation</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The application shows that the organisation has the appropriate skills and expertise to deliver the project, demonstrating good planning.</li> </ul>	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The applicant demonstrates the project can be up and running immediately, or in a very short timeframe.</li> </ul>	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The applicant demonstrates business continuity planning to keep the project running for up to the end of 2020 should the provider's operations be directly affected by COVID-19.</li> </ul>	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The application demonstrates that the project is good value for money and includes a detailed and comprehensive budget and plan.</li> </ul>	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The location where the project will be delivered is clearly identified and targeted to seniors in NSW.</li> </ul>	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The application identifies the number of seniors to whom the project will be targeted and delivered or is expected to be delivered.</li> </ul>	✓

## 5 Other important information

### 5.1 What reporting and evaluation will be required?

Grant recipients will deliver their projects to the end of 2020, with a report due at the project's completion.

Evaluation of the funded projects will be critical in determining the success of the program. Therefore, outcomes that are identified in the application for the project will need to be reported on in the Final Report.

The Final Project Report will detail what happened with the proposed project (successes, learnings, outcomes) and will include any information required by the special conditions of the grant agreement (where there are any).

The Financial Acquittal will show that the funds were expended as per the approved budget in your grant agreement. You will need to keep receipts of all grant expenditure. An office holder in your organisation will be required to certify that the grant funds have been expended as per your grant report.

We may require an Auditor to sign a form declaring that grant funds have been expended as per the approved grant budget in your grant.

Any variation to the approved grant budget and/or scope needs prior written approval.

The project Final Report and Financial Acquittal will be due two months after completion of the project.

The NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet website has an [Evaluation Toolkit](#) and Program Evaluation Guidelines that provide advice and resources for planning and conducting a program evaluation, and tools that can assist you to determine how best to evaluate your project.

## 5.2 Notified policies and standards

**Insurance:** Grant recipients must have current and adequate insurance appropriate to the projects/activities funded under this grant program. The insurance must be maintained to cover any liability of the grant recipient that might arise in connection with the performance of its obligations under a Funding Agreement.

Grantees must, on request, promptly provide to DCJ any relevant insurance policies and certificates of currency for inspection. These include but are not limited to:

- Workers Compensation Insurance
- Professional Indemnity Insurance
- Public Liability Insurance – a minimum of \$10 million.

**Media and disclosure of project information:** Grant recipients agree to information about the project being used for promotional and media purposes. DCJ, on occasion, may provide certain information to the Office of the Minister for Seniors, Members of Parliament, and the media for promotional purposes. This information will include your organisation and event name, project description, electorate, town, and the grant amount.

We may also ask applicants and grant recipients whether they would be interested in taking part in certain media activities, such as photo or video shoots, media calls or media releases.

Grant recipients agree to acknowledge the contribution of the NSW Government in accordance with the NSW Government Brand Guidelines, found at <https://communications.dpc.nsw.gov.au/branding>

## 5.3 Privacy

The NSW Government will collect and store the information you voluntarily provide to enable implementation of this grant program. Any information provided by you will be stored on a database that will only be accessed by authorised personnel and is subject to privacy restrictions. The information will only be used for the purpose for which it was collected.

Applicants must ensure that people whose personal details are supplied with applications are aware that the NSW Government is being supplied with this information and how this information will be used.

Information received in applications and in respect of applications is treated as confidential. However, documents in the possession of the government are subject to the provisions of the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009. Under some circumstances a copy of the application form and other material supplied by the applicant may be released, subject to the deletion of exempt material, in response to a request made in accordance with the Act.

## 6 Support and advice

Advice and support about this grant program is available by emailing [ageing@facs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:ageing@facs.nsw.gov.au). Please include Combatting Social Isolation in the subject line and someone will get back to you within one working day. If you are not familiar with the SmartyGrants management system, the SmartyGrants Help Guide for Applicants is available at <https://applicanthelp.smartygrants.com.au/help-guide-for-applicants/>