



New hotline for older Australians during COVID-19 pandemic launched

A new COVID-19 hotline will help older Australians get the critical information they need to stay healthy and safe during the pandemic, providing an accessible one-stop source for personal support, questions and up-to-date guidelines.

Council on the Ageing (COTA) Australia, National Seniors Australia, Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN) and Dementia Australia have banded together, supported by the Commonwealth Government, to create the National COVID Older Persons Information Line. Older people and carers are encouraged to call **1800 171 866** to speak to friendly, specially trained staff from a senior's advocacy organisation.

OPAN CEO Craig Gear said the hotline will provide particular support to those accessing aged care services who are disproportionately impacted by health precautions and restrictions.

"People are scared and confused. Many are unsure what is safe what isn't. The hotline is an important part of what will need to be a big community response. We need everyone checking in and supporting older people in aged care in particular because they are vulnerable to both the virus and social isolation," said Mr Gear.

"Our message to older people is that there is no need to do this alone. There are services there if you need them. There are no stupid questions."

COTA Chief Executive Ian Yates said older Australians often don't have access to the internet and have understandable concerns and uncertainties about how to minimise their exposure while carrying out all their necessary activities.

"The government has very sensibly advised Australians over 70 to stay at home as much as possible. This means many people have questions about what they should or shouldn't do or how they can get access to groceries, health care and other services. This hotline will provide the information they need and allow them to speak to an organisation they can trust about their concerns," Mr Yates said.

National Seniors CEO Professor John McCallum said the service provides experienced and understanding call centre staff who will be a friendly and sympathetic voice at the other end of the line.

"It's unrealistic to expect older Australians who are living alone and are told to stay home, not to suffer some sort of mental anguish, anxiety and uncertainty.

"This helpline is there to help them through what are challenging times for all of us, but especially our seniors. We're all in this together," Professor McCallum said.

Dementia Australia CEO Maree McCabe said we encourage people living with dementia, their families and carers to call and they will be connected with our trained Dementia Australia advisors.

"We can offer strategies and support for families with concerns about a loved one in residential care. We can support carers of a loved one at home who might be struggling with isolation or changes in routine," Ms McCabe said.

"And we are here for people living with dementia to talk through their own issues and come up with solutions to support them through this period of uncertainty."

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