

18 November 2022

Dear Committee Secretariat,

Submission to Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport | Inquiry into Long COVID and Repeated COVID Infections

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into Long COVID and Repeated COVID Infections. In our response, we have focused on highlighting the impact of long COVID and repeated COVID infections on our sector under section 4 of the terms of reference.

About the Federation

The Federation is the peak body for Victoria's 46 Community Legal Centres (CLCs). Our members are at the forefront of helping those facing economic, cultural or social disadvantage and whose life circumstances are severely affected by their legal problem.

For 50 years CLCs have been part of a powerful movement for social change, reshaping how people access justice, creating stronger more equitable laws, and more accountable government and democracy. We want a community that is fair, inclusive and thriving: where every person belongs and can learn, grow, heal, participate and be heard.

Impact of long COVID and multiple COVID infections on our sector

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the community legal sector and the sector's capacity has been constrained by staff contracting long COVID and multiple COVID infections. This has occurred at a time when CLCs face high demand for legal assistance from the community. Last year, CLCs provided legal services to over 100,000 Victorians and half a million people used online tools and self-help resources developed by our centres. Legal assistance with family violence intervention orders, housing, debt collection and financial legal issues doubled.

At the Federation alone, two of our staff members out of a small team have been diagnosed with long COVID, and more have experienced multiple COVID infections. Our staff with long COVID have had to take significant periods off work or drop to part-time. In some instances, they have had to take unpaid leave where they did not have sufficient personal leave accrued. We understand that the experience at the Federation is likely reflected across the community legal sector, and more broadly across the community services sector given the high prevalence of long COVID and multiple COVID infections in Australia.

This not only comes at a significant personal cost for the staff member who is unwell from a financial, social, health and wellbeing perspective, but can have a profound impact on organisational capacity. It can result in service disruption where staffing levels cannot be maintained and constrain the sector's capacity to meet significant community demand.

Case study

One of our staff initially contracted COVID in early January 2022. Since then, she has developed long COVID, as well as had 2 more acute COVID infections.


Her symptoms included extreme fatigue, body aches, nausea, dizziness and brain fog. Flare ups were unpredictable, and meant that she had often had to take unscheduled leave days. Despite dropping to part-time hours, she still required additional time off during some weeks when the flare ups were intense. Due to only joining the organisation recently, she had to take a number of unpaid sick leave days as her sick leave balance was at nil.

While she felt incredibly supported at work, and had the flexibility she needed to take the time off to recover, unfortunately her sick leave entitlements were exhausted quickly.

The Federation and CLCs are funded (at least in part) through government grants, and many CLCs rely solely on this form of funding. Many CLCs' resources are stretched and would require specific COVID-19 related funding to support staff who require additional personal leave due to long COVID or multiple COVID infections or to fill staffing gaps.

We recommend that government funding include provision for additional long COVID leave for all staff and factor in COVID-19 specific funding as part of grants. This will help to reduce service disruption, ensure staff retention and give staff the support they need to get well and continue providing critical support to people in need.

Yours sincerely,



Louisa Gibbs
Chief Executive Officer