



**Victorian Local Government  
Information, Program and Activity Support  
to Older People During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

**Final Report**

**February 2021**

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*Victorian Council Program and Activity Support to Older People During the COVID-19 Pandemic research and report has been prepared by the MAV for discussion with member councils and the State Government on the COVID-19 response.*

*While this paper aims to broadly reflect the views of local government in Victoria, it does not purport to reflect the exact views of individual councils.*

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## 1. Introduction

The MAV undertook a survey of Victorian councils in September 2020 to better understand how they supported older residents during the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey collected information on the processes used to contact older people; the type and format of communication; the activities, programs and supports established and their format; support for improving digital literacy; support for senior's organisations and the actions put in place by councils to support the return of older people to community life as pandemic restrictions ease. The survey did not collect information from councils on emergency food relief, this information is available through other sources.

The survey data reveals the breadth of support provided by councils to older community members with a wide range and number of programs initiated which provided opportunities for older people to participate in fitness, arts, crafts, music, educational, social and intergenerational activities. Many digital training programs were provided to enable older people to participate in activities on-line and for them to feel confident in using digital services and information.

Sixty-five (82%) of Victoria's 79 councils responded to the survey with all council types represented across metropolitan, interface, regional city and rural councils. Older people make up over 20% of the population in 41 of the responding councils (Table 1). Across council types there are differences in the proportion of people aged over 65 years with the highest proportions found in small rural councils.

**Table 1**  
**Councils Responding to the Survey**

Council Type	Number of councils responding	% of all councils responding	Number of councils with over 20% of population aged 65+
Metropolitan	22	34%	11
Interface	8	12%	1
Regional City	7	11%	6
Large rural	11	17%	6
Small rural	17	26%	17

A high proportion (83%) of councils responding to the survey took up the state government offer of the Community Activation and Social Isolation (CASI) funding establishing a local Community Connector linking people through council to a wide range of supports available in the community.

## 2. Providing Information and Keeping Older People Informed

The survey sought information on how councils provided information to older people during the pandemic. The data provides an insight into the range of approaches used by councils and the processes used to contact older people and keep them informed. The survey asked a question on the lists or databases of older people council had access to at the start of the

pandemic. The data in Table 2 shows the data sources used by councils to connect them with older residents.

**Table 2**  
**Ready Access to Contact Information for Older People**

	Number of Responding Councils	% of Responding Councils	% of Metro Councils	% of Rural Councils
Council had access to a Vulnerable Persons Register	55	85%	67%	100%
Council only had a list of those receiving community care services	33	51%	50%	51%
Council had access to a range of lists of older people from different council departments	19	29%	33%	26%
Council had access to an up-to-date Community Register	13	20%	20%	20%
Council still does not have a list	2	3%	3%	3%
Council had to start a new list	1	2%	0%	3%
Council had no access to any lists	0	0%	0%	0%

It is worth noting that all councils had access to some type of list or database of older people with no councils indicating they 'did not have access to any contact lists'. Councils used a variety of ways to draw together contact lists across council departments with just one council (rural) indicating they had to start a new list.

At the start of the pandemic councils worked to identify older people in the community to enable support and information to be provided to them. Many councils had access to a Vulnerable Persons Register with this more likely to be rural councils. These registers contain small numbers of the 'most vulnerable' people, are not older age specific and were established to assist with support and evacuation during emergency management responses particularly during bushfires.

The data suggests one-fifth of both metropolitan and rural councils had access to an up-to-date community register. These registers differ from Vulnerable Persons Registers and are databases held predominantly by councils or at police stations, are generally managed by volunteers and contain contact information which has been provided voluntarily by an older person. Thirteen (20%) councils indicated they had access to a community register.

*An opportunity to have the list for self registration would be very beneficial however resources required for management of the list. We need to explore opportunities connecting with older people via existing community newspaper or local community radio*

Although councils had access to a range of lists, the pandemic has identified that the task of making contact with older people can be a challenge in difficult times and may need to be reviewed.

### 3. Methods of Contact Used by Councils

The methods councils used to contact older residents are outlined in Table 3 below. A wide range of formats were used by councils during the pandemic including telephone calls, printed newsletters and on-line communication.

**Table 3**  
**Approaches Used by Councils to Contact Older People**

	Number of Councils Responding	% All Responding Councils	% Metro Councils	% Rural Councils
One-on-one telephone calls to those on existing council lists	55	85%	93%	77%
One-on-one telephone calls to the most vulnerable	54	83%	87%	80%
Printed newsletters sent by mail	51	78%	87%	71%
Referred people to other agencies providing telephone contact and follow ups	48	74%	83%	66%
Other on-line communication	47	72%	77%	69%
Follow-up telephone calls to those initially contacted during the pandemic	46	71%	77%	66%
Regular on-line newsletter	32	49%	70%	31%
Provided translated information for older people in community languages	24	37%	73%	6%
Other	18	28%	30%	26%

Telephone calls to those on existing council lists were the most frequently used form of contact with older people (85% of councils) with this communication used by a higher percentage of metropolitan (91%) than rural councils (77%). One-on-one calls to the most vulnerable older people were made by 83% of councils and 71% of councils made follow up telephone calls to older people contacted at the start of the pandemic with 77% of metropolitan and 66% of rural councils making these calls.

*Our community have fed back their appreciation of phone calls and paper newsletters. Very few show interest in being supported with technology, although the opportunity has been offered. We still plan on working with any participants who have shown an interest.*

During lockdown a high proportion (78%) of councils connected with older people through printed newsletters sent by mail with a higher proportion of metropolitan councils (84%) than rural councils (71%) using this format for communication. Given that many older people do not have access to digital information councils were able to continue to connect with older people on their mailing lists using the post.

*“When making welfare calls older people were asked if they wanted the regular Council newspaper posted to them. Very high number(s) want hard copy information.”*

*“Increase in mail-outs to keep older community members informed, in particular, members who did not have access or who had limited capacity to use social media platforms.”*

*“Physical mail is still key for our shire’s older residents. Especially where the internet is not always available or reliable.”*

*“Direct post (mail and newsletters) and local newspaper seems to be the best way to keep older people informed.”*

Online information with the posting of regular newsletters was used by 49% of councils. Metropolitan councils (70%) were far more likely to use this format for communicating with older people than rural (31%) councils. The need to further develop this communication format and the skills and resources required by older people to access it is evident from the following comments.

*“Targeted and diverse use of platforms to share community information improved throughout the restrictions. There is still a way to go to improve communications for those who are not connecting digitally though.”*

*“We have been aware for some time that we have difficulty connecting some seniors with information about our programs and activities. Those people who prefer paper communications and word of mouth have always been harder to reach and COVID-19 has highlighted this difficulty. COVID-19 has brought to light the extent of the digital gap between generations. We still have a long way to go in both providing digital access for older adults and encouraging digital interactions for those who have access.”*

*“Purchases of IPADS and Zoom licences by Council has also assisted older people to understand how to use digital devices to remain connected.”*

Thirty-seven percent of councils provided translated information to older people from non-English speaking backgrounds with this was more likely to be in metropolitan (73%) than rural councils (6%), reflecting the higher proportion of people from CALD backgrounds in metropolitan areas.

Comments from councils reflect a range of formats used by councils to communicate with older people during COVID including

*“Via community/neighbourhood houses and community networks, including seniors groups, pharmacies”*

*“(Using) Bush Fire Recovery Hubs”*

*“Regular online community leader’s newsletter for those supporting older people (e.g. Senior Citizens Club and U3A committees)”*

*“Written letter correspondence”*

*“Community Noticeboards, Radio Program, Mayors Update and Council Update in local newspapers for all community members.”*

*“(Council) created a Community Recovery Call Centre”*

*“Online programs and discussion groups, telephone-based discussion groups”*

Councils (74%) also assisted older people by referring them to other agencies for telephone contact and follow-up. This referral was part of the support offered by councils to older people in addition to the support they provided. More metropolitan councils (74%) than rural councils (66%) made those referrals.

#### **4. Keeping Older People Informed**

Almost half (46%) of the councils responding to the survey stated that getting information to older people was difficult at the start of the pandemic, more so in rural municipalities (51%) than metropolitan (40%) indicating the challenges faced by many councils. Councils were concerned about older people who are not digitally connected with 78% seeing this remaining as a challenge for council.

**Table 4**  
**Council activities around keeping older people informed about news, opportunities, events and activities during COVID-19**

	Total Number Responding	% of Responding Councils	% Metro Councils	% Rural Councils
It was difficult at the start of the pandemic	30	46%	40%	51%
Council has provided digital training and support to older people to help keep them connected	28	43%	60%	29%
Council has ensured translated material has been available to older people	21	32%	50%	17%
Council now has good processes in place to keep older people up to date	35	54%	60%	49%
Older people who are not digitally connected remain a challenge for council	51	78%	80%	77%
Other	16	25%	23%	26%

*“We have grown our community contacts who are able to act as supports and communicators of key information. This will continue into the future.”*

Just over half (54%) of the councils responding to the survey believe they “now have good processes in place to keep older people up to date” but rural councils (49%) are less confident of this than metropolitan councils (60%). This data suggests that many councils need to establish better processes to get information to older people keeping in mind that



information sent by email or through social media is not always an effective format for many older people.

*“We're doing the best we can with the available resources and have been applying for grants to deliver innovative programs but the inability to reach everyone we use to reach through our Positive Ageing Newsletter has been a blow. From another perspective we have been able to engage other more organic ways to reach Seniors who are not engaged digitally such as communicating through clubs and community groups. Most community groups and club leaders have been communicating with their members via regular phone check ins and we've been able to support them with providing information and support to reach older people not doing so well due to isolation and health issues.”*

One council suggested that it would be valuable for the capacity of community radio stations to be built so they can provide, prioritise, and support delivery of important information to older people.

## 5. Digital Skills Training for Older People

Just over half of the responding councils (52%) provided digital skills training during COVID with a higher proportion of metropolitan councils providing digital training (77%) than rural councils (31%). Councils (57%) also played an important role in linking people to other training opportunities in the community.

Community organisations were also important in providing training to older people with this training available in 51% of council areas. Many councils also linked people to other training opportunities in the community. There is more work that can be done to build the digital skills of older people particularly in rural areas.

**Table 5**  
**Availability of digital skills training**  
**for older people during the pandemic**

	% All councils	% Metro	% Rural
Yes - Council has provided training opportunities	52%	77%	31%
Yes - community organisations have provided training opportunities	51%	50%	51%
Yes - we have linked people into other training opportunities	57%	60%	54%
No - Council has not provided any digital training opportunities	22%	10%	31%
No - community organisations have not provided digital training opportunities	0	0	0

## 6. Using Digital Means to Connect

Seventy-seven percent of councils responding to the survey believe the number of older people connecting digitally to council programs/activities/information increased during the pandemic. This percentage is similar across both metropolitan and rural councils and

indicates observable change in how older people are connecting to council programs, activities and information. However, a high percentage (72%) of councils believe there is more they can do to connect with older people.

*“COVID-19 has highlighted the critical issue of digital inclusion for older people. Our most vulnerable people (frail aged; socially isolated; financially disadvantaged) are the least likely to be digitally connected. “*

*“Seniors groups have had mixed success in keeping members informed and will benefit from digital inclusion activity. Similarly, CHSP users would benefit from increased digital skill as it has proved difficult and time-consuming to communicate government advice to these people in a timely manner.”*

A high proportion (77%) of councils believe the number of older people using digital connection to council programs/activities/information increased during the pandemic.

*“Older people are more digitally connected than was thought, so online options will continue.”*

*“The importance of print media and upskilling older people in technology has been highlighted and we will keep working towards this.”*

There is an opportunity from the pandemic for councils to consider their future role in providing digital training for older people as they use more digital communication formats. An increase in council led training coupled with recent government funding of community-based initiatives could create opportunities for older people to be better connected in coming years.

## **7. Translated Materials**

Thirty-two percent of councils indicated they had made translated materials available to the community. This relatively low number of councils providing translated material could have resulted in some older people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds having less access to information about community opportunities during the pandemic. The difference in availability of translated materials between metropolitan (50%) and rural (17%) councils is quite marked, however, this may reflect the relatively lower number of people from CALD backgrounds in many rural council areas in Victoria. The need is recognised by the following comments:

*“There is always a need for translation of materials to be prioritised.”*

*“There has been significant collaboration across Council to ensure engagement and communication with harder to reach groups in the community, including older people and those from CALD communities.”*

## 8. Learnings from the Pandemic around communication

Eighty-three percent of councils believe the learnings around communication with older people during COVID19 will see change continue beyond the pandemic. Many councils commented on their learnings highlighting some important issues to be considered for the future including:

*“Moving forward, it needs to be acknowledged that a mix of both traditional and online communications must occur.”*

*“The uptake of online and telephone programming provides a new diverse range of services that we will likely continue post COVID.”*

*“We are distributing iPads and training to clients in the use of technology, which will continue. Many are keen to connect.”*

*“Most often older people asked their trusted Direct Care Workers for information and seem to prefer face to face or telephone communication rather than on-line or electronic options.”*

*“Increased thought into the use Community Noticeboards, especially for older (all) people not travelling outside of their township.”*

*“The importance of using a range of media to provide information - this included the use of local radio stations.”*

*“This reinforced the need for communication with older people to be largely paper based. That there is a percentage that want to learn about technology but in the comfort of their own home and at their own pace.”*

*“There is an appetite by older people to learn how to use digital devices to connect with others. E-newsletters have needed to shift away from simply informing people about activities in community to becoming a vehicle to engage older people by calling for the sharing of stories, ideas to stay connected etc. “*

*“We have used more digital mediums - replace social activities (cafe programs) but the welfare phone calls were most popular.”*

*“It has strengthened the argument the paper-based information is still very relevant and necessary.”*

## 9. Programs Provided by Councils

During the pandemic councils offered a wide range of programs to their older residents with activities and supports provided on-line and in non-digital formats (Table 6). These included telephone chat programs (69%) using both mobile phones and landlines. A wide range of

programs were offered in digital format including interest groups (45%), performances (43%), chat programs (34%) and arts and crafts programs (29%).

*“COVID19 presented opportunities to communicate and provide social connection to older people through on-line platforms. Older people have engaged with this form of communication and interaction and we will continue this format post pandemic as a part of our overall service delivery and communication methods.”*

Intergenerational programs were offered by a third of councils although most of these were in metropolitan council areas. Programs targeted at people from CALD communities were provided by fifteen councils (15) mostly in the metropolitan area.

Overall, councils implemented a wide selection of programs through different formats to engage older people. Councils recognised the importance of telephone and digital formats for programs so that those people without digital skills or access to digital equipment could still engage in programs and activities.

**Table 6**  
**Programs established by councils to connect older people to the community during COVID-19 restrictions**

	Total Number of Councils	% All Councils	% Metro Councils	% Rural Councils
Telephone chat programs	45	69%	87%	54%
On-line interest group programs	29	45%	63%	29%
On-line performances	28	43%	53%	34%
Other arts/crafts programs	25	38%	50%	29%
Inter-generational programs	22	34%	53%	17%
On-line chat programs	22	34%	53%	17%
On-line arts/crafts programs	19	29%	50%	11%
Programs targeted at people from CALD backgrounds	15	23%	40%	9%
Other performance formats	9	14%	27%	3%
Other	38	58%	50%	60%

Creative approaches to supporting older people are outlined in the comments made by councils in response to this question and include: activity packs, craft packs, a Pen Pal Partnership program, Virtual Men’s Shed, Support for Carers - High Tea at Home, Porch Performances, online exercise classes, ‘Distraction’ packs, a newsletter filled with personalised stories, regular phone chats, library delivery to the home and digital training.

*“Delivery of activity packs to clients based on expressed interest such as crossword, trivia, knitting, colouring books. Including activities in other languages.”*

Councils also developed ways to extend the reach of their support including working with seniors' groups, supporting U3A's, Men's Sheds and Neighbourhood and Community Houses in their work.

The variety and innovation in programs offered by councils is evident from the following comments from the survey:

*“Snail mail art groups; lifting spirits packs home delivered, newsletters, Walk with Me service, community food relief as option to stay connected, offering seniors groups flexibility with funding, comprehensive social and economic grants program that has enabled people to keep connected - e.g. on-line LeapsNBounds festival, support of U3A and much more across the organisation.”*

*“Library delivery to the home. Knitting and crocheting projects “*

*“Online Seniors Strength through Facebook every Friday, Library home delivery for vulnerable people, tech support over the phone for accessing online library resources, extensive promotion of Seniors Festival Online.”*

*“Partnered with local Community House to support people to loan technology to access online formats”*

*“ ‘The Secret Ingredient is always Love’ - Cook Book Project - Social Support Groups. - Pen Pal Partnership - Social Support Group & Copperfield College. - Telephone Group Bingo - Social Support Groups. - Virtual Men's Shed - Partnership with Melton City Council Men's Shed and Eltham Men's Shed. - Support for Carers - High Tea at Home - We have gone to seniors' houses to put on (socially distanced) 30min Porch Performances. These have been great to engage with older residents, as well as providing some income to local performers”*

*“Delivery of puzzle packs/activities, pen pal program”*

*“Activity packs including exercise program. Meals clients supported in exercise program by Leisure staff that were engaged in meal delivery”*

*“A newsletter filled with personalised stories by the clients on their history was distributed weekly but has now become fortnightly has been beautifully written by a staff member. The clients love these newsletters and are waiting eagerly at the letter box. The clients are now contributing to the content.”*

*“Staff are pulling together a radio program which will be accessible for the elderly.”*

*“Social distanced veranda chats and walks round the block  
Activity/care packs meal vouchers”*

## 10. Council Support to Seniors Clubs and Organisations

During the pandemic councils supported seniors' clubs and organisations (Table 7) in different ways including online meetings, training and keeping them informed.

Groups were unable to meet or use council facilities during lockdown with many councils (58%) taking action to lessen the financial burden to these clubs and organisations by reducing fees and other charges.

A high proportion (80%) of councils supported clubs and organisations in other ways during lockdown. Support and training were provided to seniors' groups (53%) with 70% of metropolitan compared to 40% of rural and regional councils providing this. Nearly half of the responding councils (48%) conducted online meetings to keep the groups informed and engaged throughout lockdown.

Council support for their Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) groups is evident with 42% targeting information and support to these groups during the pandemic lockdown. This support was more heavily concentrated in metropolitan councils (77%) than rural councils (11%) reflecting the higher proportion of CALD seniors in metropolitan councils.

**Table 7**  
**Council support to local seniors' organisations and clubs**  
**during the COVID19 lockdown**

	Number of councils	% Responding councils	% Metro	% Rural
Working with clubs/organisations on re-activation plans post lockdown	56	86%	93%	80%
Developing council policies and procedures for reactivation of facilities post lockdown	54	83%	90%	77%
Supporting seniors' clubs/organisations in other ways during lockdown	52	80%	83%	77%
Reducing fees/other charges to clubs and organisations	38	58%	67%	51%
Providing support and training to clubs and organisations	35	53%	70%	40%
Online meetings to keep clubs/organisations updated and informed	31	48%	73%	26%
Targeting information and support to CALD seniors' groups	27	42%	77%	11%

In terms of planning for a return to COVID normal operations, a high proportion (86%) of councils undertook development of reactivation plans to get clubs back with the easing of COVID restrictions with 83% of councils at the time indicating they were developing policies and procedures for reactivation of facilities post lockdown.

The following comments reflect the issues faced and work undertaken by councils. Councils continued to explore how they could support seniors groups and particularly those groups not digitally connected.

*“Provided COVID community grants funding to community groups to support initiatives to keep older people and other vulnerable groups connected to people and services.”*

*“Committees of seniors’ groups have struggled to find a happy balance during the pandemic regarding keeping connected with members and remaining accountable to Consumer Affairs regarding their registration. Keeping committees informed has been essential to supporting older people to manage their worry at this time.”*

*“Many seniors’ groups reporting back that the majority of their members are not connected. One organisation reported that 55 of their 80 members do not have a mobile phone or computer. They have tried to look at a support network to get those who are not connected supported but they are explicitly saying they are not interested in learning. Covid-19 has made the usual connection of Council by physically attending meetings with these groups on a regular basis difficult because many are not meeting”*

## 11. Connection to Older Residents

Council connection with older residents was explored in the survey with just 15% believing their connection has always worked well. The data indicates an improvement in council connection with older residents during COVID-19 lockdown, with 29% of councils indicating that the way in which they connect with older people is now working better with a higher proportion of metropolitan (37%) to rural councils (23%) stating this. Just one council stated that the connection was not working well.

Many councils believe there is more they can do (72%) to connect with older residents. More metropolitan councils (80%) than rural councils (66%) stated this. The survey found just one council (rural) stating that communication was not working well.

**Table 8**  
**Council connection with older residents**

	% All councils	% Metro	% Rural
Yes, and it has always worked well	15%	10%	20%
Yes, and it is now working better	29%	37%	23%
No, it is not working well	2%	0%	3%
There is more we could do	72%	80%	66%
Unsure	3%	3%	3%

It is expected that councils will be considering their modes of communication with older people into the future. The following comments help illustrate the issues around communication and the pandemic:

*“COVID19 restricted the traditional methods of connecting with older residents and presented opportunities to communicate and provide social connection to older people through the use of on-line platforms. This resulted in the development of an on-line program called (name removed) providing a variety of on-line social support options for older people to engage with their community and*

*support their health and wellbeing. Weekly welfare and social connection calls also strengthened councils' connections with older people”*

*“Council is considering producing a creative engagement, outreach piece targeted at the socially and in some cases geographically isolated members of (the) Shire communities. We aim to produce a series of audience specific creative postcards to be sent to targeted groups gently seeking an initial engagement response through a “return postcard” in key locations in communities (no postage required). The return postcards will highlight the individual’s appetite for information around topics such as loneliness, social isolation, financial hardship, emergency management preparedness and others. Community members will then be responded to individually with targeted support options available to them through the Local Support network and other partners. They will be placed (with permission) on to a database for opportunities and programs in the future to be sent to them.”*

*“Through our Positive Ageing, Diversity Team and Aged Care Services we are maintaining strong connections, however this is only with residents who are registered or known. A lot of Council's communication has gone online ..... There is an assumption from the broader organisation that everyone is online. There will be older people who we have not connected with and there is (the) potential (that) if they are in need, they may fall through the gaps”*

## **12. Activities Developed and Offered by Councils**

Councils provided a wide range of activities and activity formats for older people during the COVID-19 lockdown (Table 9). Libraries were an important focus for lockdown programs with 85% of responding councils providing library events activities during this time. Arts and cultural (82%) and fitness and health activities (82%) were also offered by many councils.

Nearly half (46%) of all councils provided programs targeted CALD seniors. Intergenerational programs were a popular response happening in 31% of councils. A number of councils developed new activities that had not been offered prior to lockdown. Intergenerational programs were offered by one-third of councils, connecting people of different ages and particularly children and young people with older people including. As a way of connecting the generations one council ran a “Pen Pal Project” in partnership with local schools and older community members and the ‘Message of Hope” postcard program in partnership with youth and older community members.

*“Intergenerational projects have seen a huge positive impact for both the younger and older people involved - this has broken down ageism barriers....”*



**Table 9**  
**Activities Provided by Councils During COVID lockdown**

	Number of responding councils	% of responding councils
Library events and activities	55	85%
Arts and cultural events	53	82%
Fitness and health activities	53	82%
Council run Seniors Festival events/activities	45	69%
Special events and activities	41	63%
Programs targeted at CALD seniors	30	46%
Inter-generational events and activities	20	31%

The state-wide Seniors Festival Reimagined set the scene for council run Seniors Festivals to also be showcased online in 2020. Nearly 70% of councils indicated their Seniors Festival events were to take place during the pandemic and programs were offered in a number of formats including on-line and with community agencies.

The way in which programs were provided (Table 10) shows how important on-line access to programs and activities was during the pandemic. However, councils were using a combination of formats across all the activities listed, enabling older people to participate whether they were digitally connected or not. Although landline and mobile phone participation formats were used across all program types, a much smaller number of councils were using this format compared to online.

The on-line program format was by a high number of councils, particularly for arts and cultural events (53%), Seniors Festival events and activities (56%), fitness and health activities (53%) and library activities (49%). Many councils used a combination of formats across all events and activities in both metropolitan and rural councils.

Some councils used community agencies and organisations to run programs and activities, and some provided programs through schools and community groups, but these formats had relatively low levels of use by councils.

Councils have been creative and responsive in thinking about how they can offer events and activities to older residents but there are some differences across metropolitan and rural councils. Intergenerational activities were more likely to be offered by metropolitan councils (87%) than rural (43%) and activities targeted at older people from culturally and linguistical diverse communities were offered by 70% of metropolitan councils compared to 9% of rural councils. But health and fitness activities were more likely to have been offered by rural councils (97%) than metropolitan councils (69%).

**Table 10**  
**Type and Format of Activities Provided by Councils**  
**During COVID-19 Pandemic**

	online only	landline or mobile phone participation	through schools, community groups etc	through community agencies/ organisations	combination of formats	Total Number	% of responding councils
arts and cultural events	53%	9%	6%	13%	49%	53	82%
	57%	13%	3%	7%	53%	30	100%
	48%	4%	2%	22%	43%	23	66%
council run Seniors Festival events/activities	56%	13%	2%	18%	47%	45	69%
	64%	20%	0%	16%	40%	25	83%
	45%	5%	5%	20%	55%	20	57%
fitness and health activities	53%	7%	4%	15%	40%	53	82%
	69%	10%	3%	21%	24%	24	69%
	33%	0%	4%	8%	58%	29	97%
programs targeted at CALD seniors	33%	20%	7%	20%	47%	30	46%
	43%	29%	5%	24%	38%	21	70%
	11%	0	11%	11%	67%	6	9%
library events and activities	49%	13%	4%	13%	53%	55	85%
	53%	13%	3%	10%	33%	26	87%
	38%	10%	3%	14%	66%	29	83%
special events and activities	41%	10%	7%	7%	63%	41	63%
	40%	10%	7%	7%	43%	22	73%
	26%	5%	5%	5%	68%	19	54%
inter-generational events and activities	32%	10%	24%	15%	49%	41	63%
	30%	10%	23%	10%	40%	26	87%
	27%	7%	20%	20%	53%	15	43%

**(Orange - metropolitan councils, green - rural councils)**

Metropolitan councils were more likely to have offered programs in an on-line format only across all program types. Resource issues may reflect the differences along with the digital challenges that exist in many rural areas.

*“In small councils there are often not the resources (staff) to carry out additional initiatives.”*

### **13. Collecting Data from Older Residents**

Twenty-five councils had collected information from their older residents at the time of survey in October 2020 and a further 32 councils were planning to do so. Gaining insight into the needs and concerns of older residents through a survey would assist councils in making appropriate decisions about how they can best support them in the time of easing of COVID restrictions.

Several councils offered comments when asked about collecting information from older people including:

*“We connect well with our existing Community Care consumers, however could improve on ways to connect with the broader community of older residents.”*

*“We have started to survey community groups and club leaders already and will be moving to wider community member surveying after the Caretaker period”*

*“Council has completed a COVID Survey and this included our older residents. Active Ageing & Disability Services are also completely its Age Friendly Survey which also looks at the impact of COVID.”*

*“We are collecting stories of life during lockdown rather than direct information. However, we are also working with groups to make sure we are aware of who is the most vulnerable and how we can assist.”*

*“It’s a very small close knit community with a number of groups operating in the area as well as very responsive, in touch aged care department that utilizes its Community Care Workers as a conduit to the community”*

### **14. Recovery and Return to Community Life in COVID-Normal**

In terms of council considering the issues that need to be addressed to get older people back into community life after pandemic it can be seen that at the time of the survey 35% of councils stated they had addressed the issue with a higher proportion of rural (43%) to metropolitan (35%) having done so.

Nearly all responding councils indicated they had or were planning to address the issue of safe return to community life providing confidence that the issues around re-emerging to a COVID-normal world will be addressed by councils.

**Table 11**  
**Recovery and Return to Community Life in COVID-Normal**

	Number of councils	% Responding councils	% Metro council	% Rural councils
Yes - council has addressed this issue	23	35%	27%	43%
No - council has not addressed this issue	2	2%	3%	3%
Council is planning to address this issue in coming months	41	63%	77%	51%
Unsure	5	8%	3%	11%

### **15. Other programs and activities councils have implemented**

Councils were very active in supporting their older residents throughout the COVID lockdown. The survey requested information on other issues and initiatives that had been initiated that had not been listed elsewhere in the survey.

The following quotes provide insight into the work of councils and their response.

*“More regular check-ins via telephone with people who have been brought to Councils attention. Increased advertising on radio and in papers letting people know how to make contact with Council if they are struggling or know someone who is.”*

*“Library services - click and collect”*

*“Bush Fire Recovery Hubs”*

*“Use of staff members for volunteer activities as existing volunteers required to isolate due to age. Creation of a COVID19 Volunteer Pool from younger members of the community. “*

*“Stay Safe, Stay Healthy, Stay Independent initiative that provided eligible older people with a LiveLife falls alarm & Fitbit Charge 4 with accompanying fitness activities”*

*“Weekly welfare & social connection calls. Community@Home on-line programs, digital skills training and the provision of smart devices in the form of an iPad Lending Library. Various DIY activities such as Hanging Plant Project. Home delivery of library books, lending of I Pads”*

*“Phone calls to vulnerable and lonely people. Engagement activities for older people.”*

*“New role (of a) social support group facilitator advertised to further facilitate programs into the future”*

These initiatives illustrate the response to the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic and how flexible and creative thinking enabled a range of new programs to be put in place.

## **16. Information to assist Councils**

Councils were also seeking information to assist their COVID responses. The following quotes capture the additional information that would assist them into the future with supporting older people.

*“Ways in which older people like to receive information - what is most effective for them.”*

*“Funding opportunities to digital technical support funding to support older people get online and use technology to access information.”*

*“Building the capacity of community radio stations so they can provide, prioritise and support delivery of important information to older people.”*

*“Better understanding and information on how older people cope in an emergency and what supports they need.”*

*“More information about the 'Community Register' mentioned in the survey, i.e. purpose, how it's being used by other Councils, any learnings, improvements, etc.”*

*“Examples of 'Best Practice' in responding to the needs of older people during and post COVID-19”*

## **17. Issues Arising for the Future**

In reviewing the survey data and input from councils the following issues have become evident and need to be considered as councils enter a phase of recovery and rebuilding in response to the pandemic.

1. The opportunity for a review of the role and value of community registers as a tool for connecting with older people. The issue needs to be carefully considered by each council and the sector as to how these lists could be created, maintained, and made accessible when need arises. Community registers may provide an opportunity into the future with 77% of all responding councils indicating that they would see value in council having access to a permanent and regularly updated community register.
2. Sharing of learnings across councils in relation to the programs and services provided by councils and how the best outcomes can be attained for older people and the resources councils have available.

3. How to build digital inclusion whilst at the same time recognising that information needs to continue to be provided to older people in written form.
4. How to maintain the innovative and successful programs and activities implemented by councils beyond COVID.
5. Developing a better understanding of how older people seek, receive and deal with information in difficult circumstances so that appropriate responses and information platforms can be put in place by councils