



**DIDI BAHINI SAMAJ VICTORIA  
PRIORITY RESPONSE TO MULTI-CULTURAL  
COMMUNITIES PROJECT (PRMC) PHASE 2**

**PROJECT TITLE:**

**DBSV COVID -19 PRMC Project  
COVID PREVENTION AND PREPAREDNESS HOUSEHOLD AUDIT  
TOOL (STUDENT SHARED ACCOMMODATION)**

***PREPARED BY***

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## **BRIEF PROJECT OUTLINE**

Data contained in this report was collected through surveys of international students administered as part of the Priority Response to Multicultural Communities (PRMC) project (Phase 2: Covid Prevention and Preparedness Household (Student Shared Accommodation)).

The project team:

- Dr Jamuna Parajuli (Project Coordinator, President of Didi Bahini Samaj Victoria (DBSV))
- Anita Bhandari (Community Engagement Worker, Didi Bahini Samaj Victoria)
- Benju Gnawali (Audit keeper/Treasurer, Didi Bahini Samaj Victoria)

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Finally, we wish to acknowledge and thank our survey respondents and the international students who have agreed to interviews for this project.

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## **PART ONE: PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

### Priority Response to Multi-cultural Community (PRMC-Phase 2) Project

#### **1.1 DBSV PRMC PROJECT**

DBSV's PRMC project was commenced to support the Nepalese community, especially those at high risk and vulnerable after Covid 19 Pandemic, through community safety and vaccine education, emergency relief and prevention, health Communications, mental health education, and casework support. This project is supported by the Victorian Government through the Priority Response to Multicultural Communities during Coronavirus (PRMC) program. The project aimed to bridge the gaps of awareness about Covid-19, vaccine roll-out programs and vaccine accessibility by Nepalese communities including international students. To fulfil this aim the project focused on identified needs by delivering information, education, coaching and mentoring, casework to enhance the livelihood of individual families, and communities as a whole by using specific innovative activities.

#### **1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT**

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic had and have a profound impact, not only on people's health but also on how they live, work and study. The PRMC program was initiated by the Victorian Government to ensure and support community organisations like DBSV to respond to the health crisis and the impacts on multicultural communities. There were several issues and challenges due to Covid-19 crisis such as food insecurity due to no income and no job or lost the job, lack of knowledge on support services: COVID-19 information, accommodation, employment, health and mental health and social isolation, loneliness, loss of and social connection. Thus, DBSV aimed to response to those priority needs of the people and provide urgent supports those in need via this PRMC project:

1. Deliver community engagement activities including a risk assessment of students shared accommodation to create and enact a Covid safe plan
2. Deliver outreach and support to vulnerable community members
3. Develop and deliver Covid-19 health communications and education, including vaccine awareness and information session
4. Undertake an action research project to identify mental health issues and the impact of Covid-19 on international students
5. Provide emergency essential items and food relief to vulnerable community members
6. Undertake casework for a selected number of vulnerable and high-risk individuals

To meet these objectives and serve the communities during this crisis period, DBSV was actively engaged to deliver engagement activities and information sessions and distribute targeted communications and promotional materials among our community members. Our team worked alongside a range of health professionals and organisations, intending to keep our communities appropriately engaged, informed about the health responses to the Covid-19 and supported with emergency reliefs.

***Information on how our project met PRMC objectives:***

1. Organised and delivered of community engagement activities; delivery of outreach and support to vulnerable community members

One of the major focus and objectives during Covid-19 was the delivery of outreach and supports to vulnerable community members and to facilitate, provide various communities engagement activities. Throughout the pandemic, DBSV came up with several community engagement activities to provide engagement and networking opportunities to our community members and to make positive impacts in people's lives during this crisis period. Various engagement, interactive and activities were organised and delivered onsite and/or virtually depending on the Covid restrictions. Additionally, DBSV supported Nepalese communities and international students during the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccine program, as well as continued to inform and support COVID Safe and emergency responses in the community.

Our COVID Outreach Program included various virtual engagement activities, capacity building projects, health and well-being sessions, information sharing sessions which were targeted outreach to Nepalese communities. DBSV team was actively engaged to organise and deliver community engagement activities and raise awareness through information sessions, workshops and forums.

NAME OF INITIATIVE.	DESCRIPTION OF THE INITIATIVE
<b>Dance Session</b>	<p>Dance classes were organised and facilitated in three 3 different suburbs of Victoria: Glenroy, Mernda-Doreen and West</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mernda-Doreen: Started from 13<sup>th</sup> July 2021. The session was facilitated every Tuesday (5-6.30 pm) at Mernda Village Community Centre. Around 30 community members were engaged via the session.</li> <li>2. Community Engagement through Covid song and Dance Practice at Glenroy Uniting Church (Dance class was</li> </ol>

		<p>facilitated every week and participants practised dance on a Covid song aimed at raising awareness about Covid vaccination. Around 15 participants were engaged.</p> <p>3. Free Dance Lesson- for girls in West (virtual dance session was facilitated every Thursday from 6 to 7 pm). Around 15 were engaged and participated in the dance class every week.</p>
<b>Online Celebration ‘Nepalese Women Festival’</b>	<b>Teej</b>	<p>Virtual Teej Celebration was organised and facilitated via Zoom on 9<sup>th</sup> September. The virtual celebration aimed to build social relationships and connections. Around 100 participants participate in the online session. And live viewers on Facebook were around 500 people.</p>
<b>Teej Make-up Practical Workshop</b>	<b>Special -</b>	<p>DBSV organised and facilitated virtual make sessions (on 01/09/2021 and 06/09/2021). Around 50 Nepalese women attended the Zoom session. The makeup sessions aimed to provide opportunity to women to learn new skills of makeup and to boost up their confidence.</p>
<b>Mental health and well-being session</b>		<p><b>Weekly Yoga and mindfulness Session ‘Yoga with Parbati’:</b> The yoga session offered community members and international students the opportunity to join our virtual yoga session every week. The session was facilitated every Sunday morning for 6 weeks (started from June to November 2021). Around 15-20 community members attended the Zoom session directly. The yoga session was broadcasted live each week where more than a hundred community members viewed the Livestream.</p>
<b>DBSV Dialogue Forum</b>	<b>Women Digital</b>	<p>DBSV Women dialogue digital forum is an open digital discussion forum for all women to share experiences, challenges and raise awareness to empower women and their families to work towards equality and a just society. During the period from June to November DBSV facilitated two women digital forums via Zoom:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Women Entrepreneurs and their Challenges: The session was held on the 8<sup>th</sup> of August, 2021 to highlight the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs and to share panel speakers’ valuable insights to inspire the initiation of women-owned and</li> </ol>

women-led enterprises. The event was attended by around 50 community members and was also broadcasted live via DBSV's Facebook and was also followed by 307 viewers.

2. "Parenting Children in different Culture: Challenges and Opportunities" (held on the 8<sup>th</sup> of November 2021): The digital platform brought together 75 participants from the Nepalese community living in Australia and provided them with an interactive session with a place for discussion and raising their queries related to parenting children in different cultures. Live session via DBSV Facebook was also facilitated. Around 400 people viewed the live stream during and post-session

**Nepalese women's Group** Various activities and programs were delivered and provided in the Nepalese Women Group. 38 Nepalese women are a member of this DBSV group. Around 15-20 women participated in each session which happened each Monday. List of activities and programs included:

1. Online Makeup classes aimed at building confidence among women
2. Women's Physical Health Education sessions: Osteoporosis, Bone health, Endometriosis, Hormone replacement therapy, Healthy Heart, Exercise, Nutrition, Asthma, Varicose Vein, Menopause, Covid-19 Vaccine
3. Women's Reproductive Health Education sessions: PCOS (polycystic ovarian syndrome), STIs (Sexually Transmitted Disease), Pelvic Floor (continence), Breast Health / Breast Cancer, Cervical Health/ Cervical Cancer, Infertility, Contraception: Depo Provera, Natural Methods, Pregnancy Choices (Abortion, Adoption, Foster care), Cystitis
4. Women's legal rights and safety sessions: Health Rights Navigating the Health System, Problem Gambling, Discrimination at workplace, Occupational Overuse Syndrome, Workplace Violence, Workplace Bullying, Prevention of

Violence Against Women, Healthy Relationships, Sexual Assault, Legal Rights Service Pathways

5. Mental Health Session: Stress, Anxiety, Depression, Better, Sleep, Mindfulness exercise, Drugs - Prescription and Non -Prescription, Alternative Therapies, Pain Management and Relaxation

**Innovative Project: Women Entrepreneurs Forum** DBSV women entrepreneur’s forum was initiated to support women to build capacity, to provide them opportunity for networking and for their economic independence and empowerment. The project is still running and final project outcome is yet to receive and evaluate.

**DBSV Walking Campaign** DBSV Walking Campaign ‘Walk for Wellness-Walk for Mental Health’ aimed to create more awareness of mental and physical health. The campaign group consists of around 50 members, where we walk around our places and share the pictures of our walk and motivate each other to walk for our well-being. This campaign is ongoing campaign approach to stay connected and to support each other.

**‘Knitting: The New Me’ Project** Community engagement and capacity building project: ‘Knitting: The New Me’ (with theme Breaking social isolation and promoting social connection) was one of the major community engagement projects. Through this project, DBSV aims to raise community awareness, promote social connection, strengthen overall mental and physical well-being.

Nepalese community members living in Melbourne were invited gradually. On the event day (27<sup>th</sup> November 2021) various activities were organised: knitting, yoga, story sharing (related to resilience), dinner. Around 60 participants attended the event. Around 150 people viewed the live session. Positive feedback and comments were received post-event.



## Snapshots of 'Knitting: The New Me Project'

**'KNITTING: THE NEW ME PROJECT': Case Study**

It's been a wonderful experience to be a part of this program. Thank you DBSV team.

**Knitting: The New Me - Story Telling**

It's been a wonderful experience to learn knitting. People tend to share stories while knitting. For me, knitting itself became a story.

I was always interested to learn knitting but never got a chance to learn. Thanks, DBSV for organising this workshop.

The journey was amazing as I was learning a new skill.

As knitting was new for me, it felt a bit difficult for me to even hold the needle.

okay, I learnt slowly to knit one line then 2 lines but it loosened up again. And I had to do it again from start. And again, and again. It's been a bit frustrating at the start while I had full attention and trying and trying but still, it doesn't work out well.

But I got inspiration from the members of the DBSV west team who knew I was struggling to get even the basics. They taught me patience and support.

I got hope. I knew if I practised more, I can knit like them. If I got confused, I would call Roshani thulomumi and she would try her best to explain. So, their support and my enthusiasm helped me to keep going and learn knitting. This was an opportunity for me to learn. The process of learning taught me that any skill in our life when we start to learn, we might feel difficult and alert, only because we are not familiar with it. With support, passion, patience and practice, we can level up with infinite possibilities. And the feeling when we achieve each level is truly blissful which builds self-belief and confidence that we can learn anything we aim for.

NEVER STOP LEARNING.

2. Developed and delivered Covid-19 health communications and education, including vaccine awareness and information session

Language has been identified as one of the challenges and barriers for international students and migrants. With the ongoing commitment, DBSV worked on communicating information on health and education concerning the COVID-19 and Covid vaccination in response to the

ongoing Covid pandemic. By focusing on communication (information delivering in the Nepali language), we aimed to enhance the accessibility and quality of information and information materials and avoid intensifying existing information gaps by leaving no one behind.

During the ongoing pandemic, we implemented various initiatives and information sessions aimed at providing online resources and updates to reach the community members and students who face language barriers in understanding and accessing services. In response to these concerns and anticipation of vaccination information sessions and vaccination support and roll-out programs, we developed flyers and distributed them via several social media platforms across our network. We supported community members and international students during the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccine program, as well as continued to inform and support COVID Safe responses in our communities. We engaged with the Victorian Government, Department of Health and various health experts to deliver information sessions. Our DBSV Unit Committee team worked alongside, to keep our community members appropriately engaged, supported and informed about the response and services to the coronavirus pandemic.

NAME OF INITIATIVE.	DESCRIPTION OF THE INITIATIVE
<p><b>Covid-19 Vaccination education and information session (Covid Vaccine and vaccine roll-out program in Victoria)</b></p>	<p>Information on the Covid pandemic, safety measures, strategies to cope up with Covid and awareness sessions regarding Covid vaccinations were delivered by DBSV via organising various Covid and Vaccination education and information sessions.</p> <p>In total 3 virtual Covid-19 and vaccination education and information sessions were delivered by our organisation:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Information Session on Covid Vaccine and vaccine roll-out program in Victoria: 8<sup>th</sup> June 2021 (led by professor Benjamin Cowie (Epidemiologist Senior Medical Advisor and Executive Director, Covid-19 Immunisation Program, Department of Health). Around 88 participants attended the Zoom session and the session was broadcasted live via DBSV Facebook where around 550 people viewed the live broadcast.</li> </ol>

	<p>2. DBSV Covid-19 Vaccination Information Session: Vaccination and Covid info were disseminated in the Nepali language by 3 health professionals during the Covid virtual info session which was organised virtually via Zoom on July 24<sup>th</sup>. Livestream was available. 52 participated in the Zoom session and around 1000 community members are estimated to reach. A promotional flyer was prepared and published via online platforms to inform community members about the session.</p> <p>3. DBSV Covid-19 Vaccination Information session (For Nepalese Community living in Mernda). The virtual information session was successfully led by Dr Bimal Lal Shrestha. Around 20-30 Mernda-Doreen Nepalese Community members attended the Zoom session. The session provided information about the Covid vaccine, raise awareness about vaccination and answer queries related to vaccination.</p>
<p><b>Covid-19 information session and mass vaccination support program- Dissemination of information re Covid Vaccination pop-up sites</b></p>	<p>Around 5 vaccination support programs were initiated to support our community members. We intended to help bridge the language and cultural gap and support our people to access the vaccination roll-out programs and during the uptakes of vaccines.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Covid vaccination support Program to Senior Parents (Buwa-Aama) (The support program was held on 18<sup>h</sup> June 2021 at Sunshine Hospital (Western Health): Targeted outreach to senior parents who came here in Australia on visit visa. Around 20 parents were vaccinated on that day)</li> <li>2. DBSV COVID-19 Mass vaccination Support Program and Information Session (for senior parents and Nepalese Community): The program was on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2021 at Broadmeadows (led by DPV Health- Covid Vaccination</li> </ol>

	<p>Centre). The mass vaccination support program was attended by around 30 community members and senior parents.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Vaccination Support Program for Nepalese Community Members in West</li> <li>4. DBSV Covid-19 Mass Vaccination Support Program and information about Covid-19 Pop-up and Walk-in Vaccination Hub at:             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Doreen-Mernda- 115 Eminence Blvd, Doreen Vic 3754 on 21<sup>st</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2021</li> <li>b. Epping (Epping Secondary College- 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> October)</li> <li>c. Glenroy (Glenroy College-1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> October)</li> </ol> </li> </ol> <p>Flyers and promotional videos, messages, emails were prepared and disseminated via our social media platforms and among our networks to aware our community members about the pop-up vaccination program at Mernda-Doreen. Also, our team members were contacted on a regular basis by the community members raising queries about Covid vaccination and vaccine roll-out program. All queries and concerns were answered by our team on a daily basis via phone calls, messages and by sharing informative resources.</p>
<p><b>Activities to promote Covid vaccination</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Online Dance session (dancing in Covid awareness song prepared to raise awareness about Covid vaccine and to urge everyone to get vaccinated)</li> <li>2. Virtual Teej program (Cultural celebration): Info sheet and informational flyers, customised sanitisers on Covid vaccines, vaccine safety, importance was prepared and distributed among 500 community members on the occasion of celebration.</li> <li>3. Covid vaccination awareness educational and promotional videos, short clips were prepared shared via online platforms: DBSV Facebook, YouTube, online chat groups and among our networks.</li> </ol>

<b>COVID-19 and vaccine communication materials translated/disseminated</b>	During emergency food relief distribution Covid-19 and vaccination awareness resources, information sheets, posters, flyers were provided and translated to community members to raise awareness about Covid-19 health resources, Covid symptoms, testing sites, isolation supports and vaccine information and vaccination roll-out and pop-sites in Victoria.
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### **CASESTUDY: COVID-19 Vaccination Virtual Information Session**

To provide information about the Covid vaccine, raise awareness about vaccination and answer queries related to vaccination, DBSV organised Covid Info Session on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2021, Saturday. The program was initially planned to be facilitated face to face in the eastern side of Victoria. However, due to the Covid-19 lockdown, it was reorganised via Zoom.

The flyer was prepared, disseminated via various online platforms; the DBSV website, Facebook page, online chat messages, phone calls. Zoom meeting link was created and disseminated via various social platforms and the details were also included in the flyer.

Nepalese community members living in Melbourne and regional Victoria were invited gradually.

3-panel speakers: Dr Raju Adhikari, Dr Prathana Kunwar K.C and Dr Chandra Deepak Pokharel were invited as guest speakers. On the day they discussed and answered various queries and topics related to Covid vaccination.

A total of 52 participants attended the Zoom session and Facebook live session reached 884 audiences.

Participant's reflection:

Participant A: It was a very informative session and in-depth presentation by panel speakers.

Participant B: It was a thoughtful information session regarding the Covid vaccine for our Nepalese community, well explained. It was very easy to understand.

Participant C: Thank you DBSV for organising such an informative session. I had many dilemmas regarding

Covid vaccination. My queries were answered very fluently and clearly by the panel speakers.

Participant D: I had a dilemma and was a bit scared to get the vaccination. I am grateful for the info session. I came to learn a lot from this session.

3. Undertaken an action research project to identify mental health issues and the impact of Covid-19 on international students

It has been highlighted that most international students find it challenging to integrate into their host communities, as a consequence, some are struggling to maintain a healthy social life. And the situation has been even worsened during the Covid pandemic. Lack of socialisation mediated by online implements during this Covid pandemic resulted in additional difficulties for students, in particular those who struggle with social and communication barriers. Hence, to explore more about the challenges and problems faced by international students, DBSV undertook an assessment i.e., Covid Preparedness and Preparation: Risk Assessment of Student Shared Accommodation and develop a Covid safe plan. The goal was to create Covid safe environment and community safety alongside person-centred education on prevention and preparedness, deliver outreach supports, emergency relief supports, support the team in implementing individual mental health support plans and design culturally sensitive intervention activities such as socialising, participating in community events, monitoring, reporting, referral pathways, providing casework supports, developing the plan and supporting vulnerable and high-risk individuals identified by the unit team.



NAME OF INITIATIVE.	DESCRIPTION OF THE INITIATIVE
<p><b>Activities to connect international students with community members</b></p>	<p>Specific programs that connect international students with other community members: Interactive and collaborative activities that build social relationships and connections by encouraging participation. Through the session, DBSV aimed to identify the physical and mental health needs and collect resources, even develop an intervention plan to respond to those identified needs of student groups by ensuring that their social and emotional needs are being</p>

	met and that the most susceptible continue to receive further supports. Some of the virtual action includes Online Dance sessions, Cultural celebration events, talk programs and information sharing programs, capacity building sessions.
<b>Mental health and well-being session</b>	Weekly Yoga Session: Offered community members and international students the opportunity to join our virtual yoga session, connect and talk with each other and share their ongoings while everyone is restricted due to restrictions imposed by Covid-19.
<b>Student self-support viber group to connect international students</b>	DBSV International student’s Viber group was formed to provide students with the opportunity to communicate, connect and share information. The student Viber group enable students to engage and connect. Furthermore, the group also was one of the mediums for our team members to communicate and share information regarding mental health supports, Covid-19 information, vaccination sites and many more. Similarly, DBSV International Student Forum was formed. The group is initiated by international students to support each other and raise concerns related to students for further research action plans and projects.

4. Provided and delivered emergency essential items and food relief to vulnerable community members, undertake casework for a selected number of vulnerable and high-risk individuals

During the Covid pandemic, with the rise in positive cases, the number of people seeking emergency relief increased dramatically. International students, young people, women, were particularly more vulnerable, many had no income during the pandemic and were not eligible for any kind of income support. Many struggled to afford necessities including food, accommodation, healthcare and also were unable to pay their regular bills. There were several COVID-19 related issues identified during the crisis time of the COVID-19 such as food insecurity due to no income and no job or lost the job due to COVID-19 pandemic, lack of knowledge on support services: COVID-19 information, housing, employment, health and mental health within the new environment and social isolation, loneliness, loss of social

connection. Majority of the people, who were employed in the hospitality industries, lost their job. On the other hand, receiving support from back home was also affected by a similar situation in Nepal. This situation influenced toughly to the life of many students living in our community. Hence, through the PRMC project DBSV responded to the urgent need and provided emergency relief supports, food reliefs and community outreach to more than 100 community members including international students who were impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

### Casework Support: COVID-19 Relief and Well-being Supports

Casework Support 1: Student A is a 21 years old international student living in Melbourne. Student A has been suffering from backache, is unable to mobilise, perform daily activities and need supports. He is for complete 2 months of bed rest, has no job and has physiotherapy input regularly.

Student A was assessed by the DBSV team provided well-being and relief supports including food as per his needs. DBSV is making referrals to multiple stakeholders now and supporting students emotionally on a regularly A is very grateful and pleased for the support and help provided by the DBSV.

“Thank you DBSV for providing me with necessary supports, food at food difficult time. I am so grateful for the help.”



### Casework support 2: COVID emergency food relief and mental health well-being support to one of the Nepalese International Student:

Student A is an international student, child care worker by profession. Student A contacted DBSV for emergency food relief and other essential need supports. Upon talking with her, Student A stated, “her working hours has been adversely affected by Covid-19, few 10 hours shifts sometimes or sometimes no hours, she is devastated, frustrated, mentally depressed, in isolation as she lost her interest in engaging in any daily activities or meeting with others.”

Student A was assessed by the DBSV team, provided with necessary food relief and other supports. Casework support was provided. Referral made to Neami to provide her with additional mental health and well-being supports.

She is very pleased and grateful for the supports provided by the DBSV team.



### Casework Support 3: COVID emergency relief food and a cooked meal prepared and delivered

Student B: An international student, suffered from Shingles. Living with another international student in shared accommodation. The virus deteriorated her ability to perform daily activities, bed-bound, could not cook and walk properly. Student B contacted the DBSV team, requested if DBSV can provide her with any supports. DBSV team assessed her, provided her with home cook meals as required, emotional supports regularly, emergency food relief packages provided during the recovery stage.



### Casework support 4: Emergency food relief supports “Not eligible for income supports from any source”

Mother A, one of the Nepalese Community members and a pregnant lady. Unable to work because of her pregnancy and her husband working hours have been adversely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Upon contacting her, she requested us if we could support them with food and other essential needs. DBSV team provided her with food relief packages including vegetables and fruits, cleaning supplies and hygiene products. Well-being and emotional supports are provided as required. She is in regular contact with the DBSV team and we are providing her with the necessary supports.



### Casework Support 5: Emergency food relief and well-being support

Mother A, one of the Nepalese Community members, was diagnosed with breast cancer, mother of a child and living with her husband in a 2-bedroom rented house in South Morang. She had major surgery in the first week of September (09/09/2021). Unable to perform daily activities, walk on her post-surgery. She needs 24 hours care and supports.

Mother A stated her husband staying at home for her 24 hours care and is not working at the moment. Financially and mentally impacted. Difficulty bearing daily financial expenses, her medical expenses and other expenses.

Casework support and assessment: Food relief needs as immediate need post-assessment. DBSV team provided her with a larger quantity food relief package including vegetables, fruits, hygiene products to support the family’s basic needs.

Telephone interventions: Regular phone calls, reassurance, well-being and emotional supports. Mother A said supports receiving from DBSV is sufficient at the moment and if she requires further supports, she will let us know. Mother A is pleased and grateful for every kind of supports given by DBSV.



## **PART TWO: COVID PREVENTION AND PREPAREDNESS- STUDENT SHARED ACCOMMODATION- Risk Assessment of Student Shared Accommodation and develop a Covid safe plan**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Various studies and literature show that international students are at increased risk of experiencing poor mental health and physical health. Coming into a foreign land where they do not know many people, having a less social connection, new culture, new environment, all the new faces, not very confident with the language and talking often tend to put extra stress on students. Despite all these international students have to make their way to Australia, where some succeed and some don't. The new findings show that the situation became even worse during the Covid-19 pandemic. Students living in shared housing in Victoria faced risky and unpredictable difficulties as a result of COVID-19, with reports of job losses and financial stress, food shortages, mental health issues, isolation.

The Report, drawing on the survey, conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, examines the impact of Covid-19 restrictions and circumstances of Nepalese international students in the shared accommodation around Melbourne. The survey started in June and ended in November. A home visit and site observation, a phone interview was conducted of all of the 80 participants who agreed to be interviewed and had provided their contact details. The survey covered various grounds related to accommodation, Covid preparedness, prevention and safety measures, food security, employment status, income situation, physical and mental health need, capacity building needs, but its primary focus was to investigate and capture the impacts of the pandemic on students' circumstances including their housing conditions, safety, preparedness, employment, income, mental health. The survey found most of the international students have lost their job or are working reduced hours during COVID-19, reporting that they had gone without meals to afford other necessities as a result of the global pandemic.

#### **2.1 BACKGROUND**

International students' experience of living in shared accommodation in Australia is a crucial but overlooked determinant of their wellbeing, which has been brought into stark relief by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This report is based on the survey of international students living in shared accommodation with other international students. The survey was conducted from June to November 2021, during the pandemic. Our survey aimed to quantify

the impact of various types of housing, socio-economic shocks caused by COVID-19 on share house occupants. The findings of the survey reveal the various impacts of the pandemic on international students in the shared accommodation and the extent to which their circumstances have deteriorated.

Although the focus is on the experiences of students' shared accommodation, the report has taken a broader sociological approach to student housing problems, covid safety, preparedness and, as such, it also offers wider insights into the mental health wellbeing, employment, and income situations of international students.

## **2.2 THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON PROJECT AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

In 2021, with the second wave of a global pandemic of Covid, Australia imposed many restrictions in response to the pandemic. During this time, online classes became the norm and non-essential services shut down; resulting in loss of social contact and income. This potentially exacerbated the sense of isolation for international students and some students were reportedly subjected to mental health during a pandemic. The pandemic, hence, affected international students' sense of safety, their mental health and financial security.

Similarly, COVID-19 also had a significant impact on this project. Project executions occurred during the Covid-19 restriction and in a period when many Nepalese international students were in isolation. This all impacted the rates of participation in the online survey rather than the onsite visit (in most cases). Even the onsite visits and interviews were executed with high precautions and safety measures. The ongoing restrictions also delayed the overall execution of the project as home visits and travelling were not allowed.

## **2.3 METHODOLOGY**

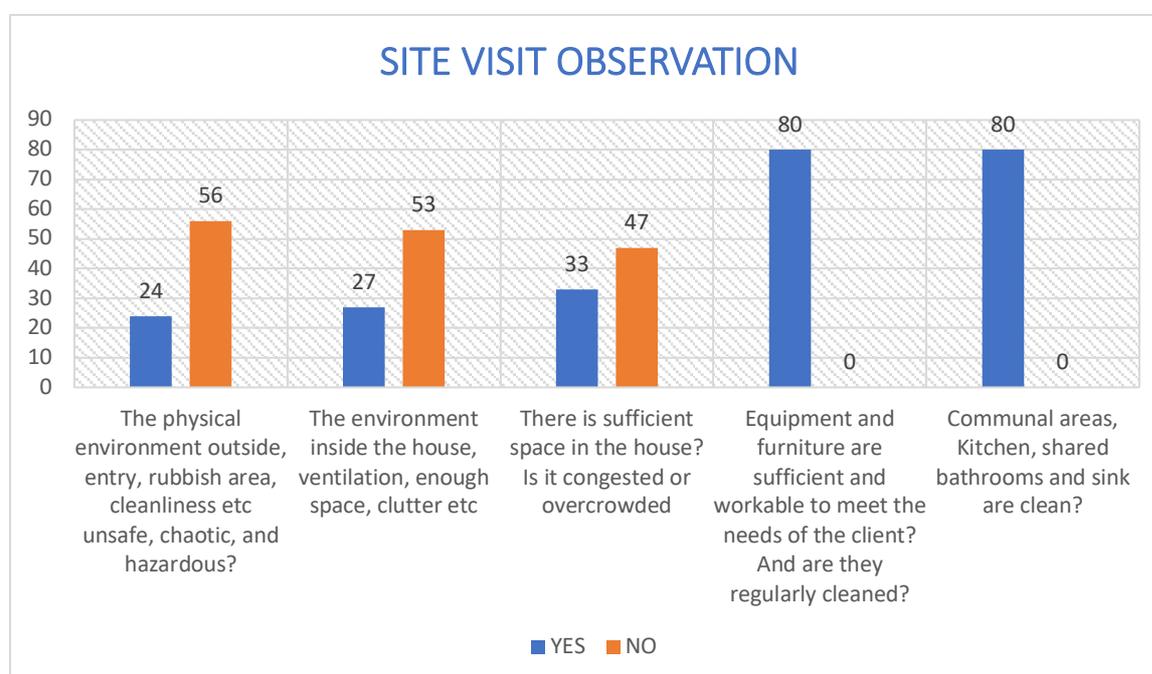
Around 80 Nepalese international students from across Victoria were interviewed for this project between June and November 2021. The survey included two approaches: face to face and telephone interviews targeting Nepalese international students for project purposes. The interviews were organized via mobile phone and an onsite visit. First, telephone calls were made to the participants to fix the time and day for the interviews and then they were contacted accordingly for the interviews. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with high precautions and safety measures. The survey was completed by Anita Bhandari with the help of a volunteer.

**Data collection tools and instruments:** A questionnaire comprised of structured questions to capture information from the participants was prepared at the beginning. Both open and close-ended questions were used to accumulate information and feedbacks. The questions were specific on home and environment assessment, Covid preparedness and safety measures, food security assessment, employment status, income, health and safety issues and assessment and capacity building needs.

## 2.4 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This section presents the overall outcomes and findings of the survey;

### 2.4.1. SITE VISIT OBSERVATION



#### Comments:

S/N	QUESTIONS	YES	NO	COMMENTS
1	The physical environment outside, entry, rubbish area, cleanliness etc unsafe, chaotic, and hazardous?	24	56	24: Unsafe, overcrowded, hazardous 56: Clean, safe
2	The environment inside the house, ventilation, enough space, clutter etc	27	53	27: Unsafe, Not Enough space, clutter 53: enough space, clean
3	There is sufficient space in the house? Is it congested or overcrowded?	33	47	33: Congested and overcrowded

				47: Not congested
4	Equipment and furniture are sufficient and workable to meet the needs of the client? And are they regularly cleaned?	80	-	There were sufficient equipment and furniture in all houses, they were cleaned regularly.
5	Communal areas, Kitchen, shared bathrooms and sink are clean?	80	-	The communal areas, kitchen, bathrooms, sinks were clean for all houses.

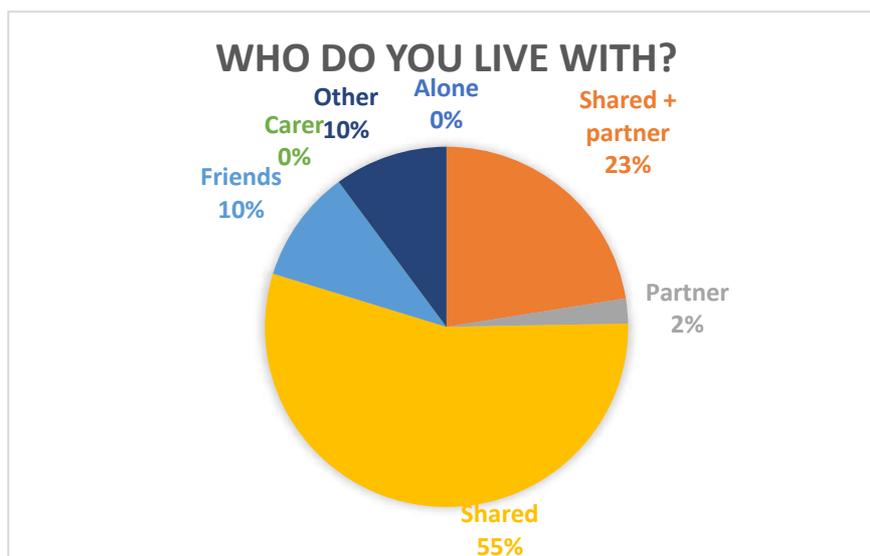
## 2.4.2. HOME AND ENVIRONMENT ASSESSMENT

### 1. The accommodation

The effects of the Covid-10 pandemic proved to have profound impacts on international students. The results of our survey conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic of international students living in shared accommodation suggest that there are concerning numbers living in quite crowded conditions, so are more prone to Covid exposures. The survey indicated more than half of the international students are living in shared accommodation and have at least more than two housemates and 25% have five or more. It was also found that some students share their bedroom with someone other than their partner or friends. The housing conditions of many international students provide abundant ground for the coronavirus to spread. If an international student tests positive for COVID-19, they will probably not have a space where they can self-isolate in this situation.

#### a. Living conditions of international students:

Alone	Shared + Partner	Partner	Shared	Friends	Carer	Other
Nil	20	2	49	9	Nil	



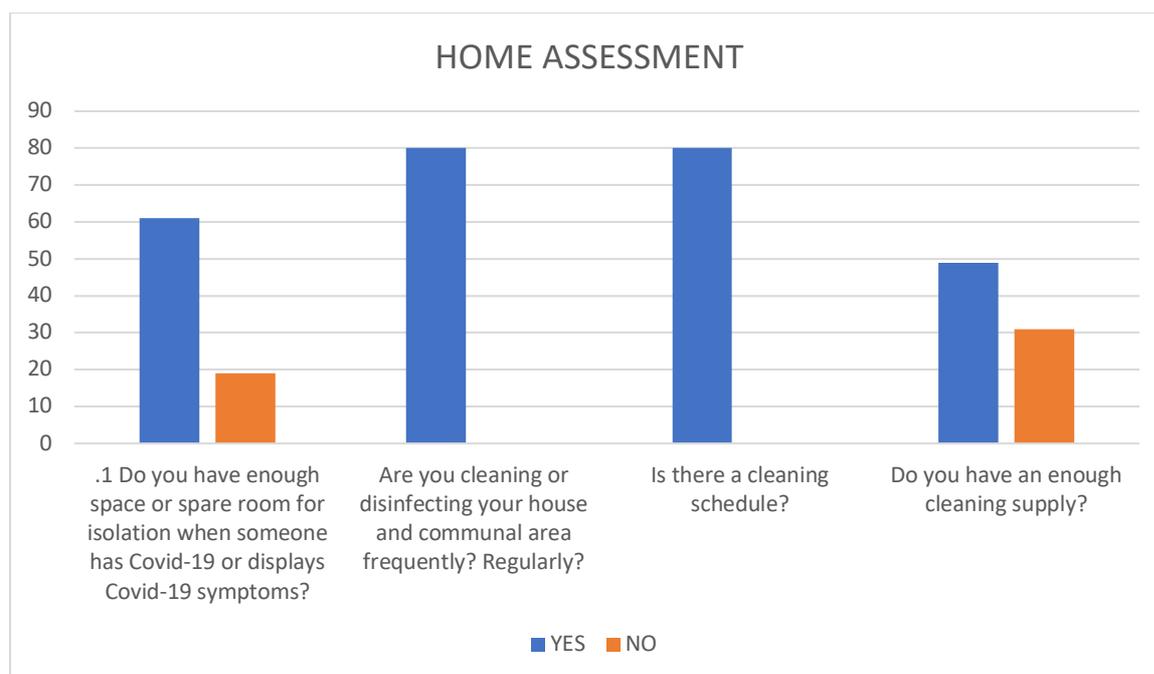
**b. Several housemates:**

Two	Three	Four	Five	More than five
3	15	17	20	25

**c. The average number of bedrooms**

One	Two	Three	Four	Five
2	20	12	46	Nil

Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
3.1 Do you have enough space or spare room for isolation when someone has Covid-19 or displays Covid-19 symptoms?	61	19	-	61 said yes 19 said they don't have enough space
3.2 Are you cleaning or disinfecting your house and communal area frequently? Regularly?	80	-	-	All participants said yes
3.3 Is there a cleaning schedule?	80	-	-	All said yes
3.4 Do you have enough cleaning supplies?	49	31	-	49 said yes 31 said no (Cleaning supplies were provided to those who said no)



**d. An average number of bathrooms or washrooms in the house?**

One	Two	Three	More than three
54	26	-	-

Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
4.1 Are you cleaning them regularly?	80	-	-	-
4.2 Is there a cleaning schedule?	80	-	-	-

**e. How often cleaning is done?**

Once a week	Twice a week	Fortnightly	Monthly	As required
36	19	-	-	25

S/N	Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
6.	Are you aware of Covid-19 and Covid-19 symptoms?  (Fever, Sweats, Cough, Sore throat, Shortness of breath, Runny nose, Loss or change in sense of smell or taste)	80	-	-	All participants said Yes. Information related to Covid-19 and its symptoms were provided
7.	Do you know about Covid prevention and safety measures?	80	-	-	Information was disseminated while providing food relief

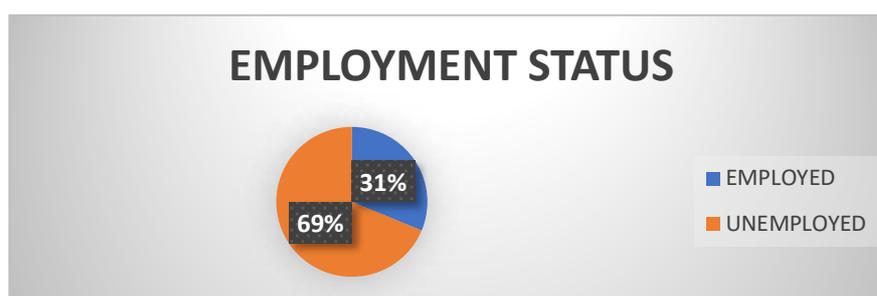
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical Distance: Maintain physical distance -1.5m apart around the home, communal areas, kitchen (when having meals)</li> <li>• Good hygiene: washing your hands, using hand sanitiser often, covering your coughs</li> <li>• Isolate yourself or stay in your room if are unwell</li> <li>• Get tested if you have a sore throat, cough, fever or any Covid symptoms</li> <li>• Frequently clean and disinfect communal areas</li> <li>• Wearing a mask or face covers when using communal areas /living/bathroom/laundry facilities</li> </ul> <p>COVID Safe Plan for homes and premises</p>				
8.	<p>What do you do when you or someone in an online house shows Covid symptoms?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you go for the Covid test or not?</li> <li>Are you aware of the nearest Covid-19 testing sites?</li> <li>Do you know that you should isolate yourself until you receive your test result?</li> <li>Are you aware of the Covid-19 test isolation payment?</li> </ol>	80	-	-	
9.	<p>Are you aware of Covid safe practices and prevention measures if you or someone is in the house shows Covid symptoms or is in isolation?</p> <p>**Prevention measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wash your hands or use a hand sanitiser before and after entering the room.</li> <li>• Ensure the sick person remains or is in one room away from others in the household.</li> </ul>	80	-	-	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close the door and open windows where possible</li> <li>• Separate sick person's crockery from others</li> <li>• Put the medical mask on when caring for the sick person, cover yourself properly</li> <li>• Clean and disinfect the house, communal areas, living rooms, bathrooms, kitchen and high touch surfaces regularly.</li> <li>• Proper disposal of masks, tissues and other rubbish in a sealed plastic bag</li> <li>• Use a fitted mask and proper PPE while washing sick person clothes.</li> </ul>				
10.	Do you have access to sufficient tissues to practice COVID safe cough and sneeze hygiene?	80	-	-	
11.	Do you have access to sufficient masks, gloves, hand sanitiser, hand wash, sinks with running warm water and knowledge about handwashing?	37	43		Hand wash, hand sanitiser, masks provided as required.
12.	Are there adequate rubbish bins, laundry facilities, cleaning equipment to practice COVID safe environment?	80	-	-	

Through the survey, it can be seen that the situation of many international students in shared accommodation is extremely risky and alarming.

### 2.4.3 INCOME SITUATIONS AND FOOD SECURITY

Significantly, we found 55 of the international students we surveyed lost jobs or were unemployed due to the Covid pandemic. Only 25 were working but their working hours was heavily reduced and impacted due to Covid lockdown.



QUESTIONS	YES	NO	N/A	COMMENT
1. Are you working?  If yes, have your working hours been affected by the Covid-19?	25	55		Common reasons for being unemployed:  a. Tested positive b. In isolation due to close contact or being in exposure site c. Ongoing lockdown and restrictions
	25	-	-	Hours reduced due to ongoing lockdown
2. Do you have access to sufficient food and essentials (including medication)?	-	80	-	Food relief is provided as and when required
3. In the past months, have there been any times when you ran out of food and could not afford to buy it? If yes, do you need food relief support?	80	-	-	
	80	-	-	Food relief provided to 80

The finding from this survey is quite concerning. International students are far more likely to have seen their financial situation worsens, found it difficult to meet their necessary costs of living, experienced a loss of job or loss of hours and been unable to pay for their basic needs including food, cleaning supplies. More than 50 per cent of respondents couldn't bear food costs, and almost a quarter wasn't confident they will be able to meet their food costs and other costs to bear their necessities.

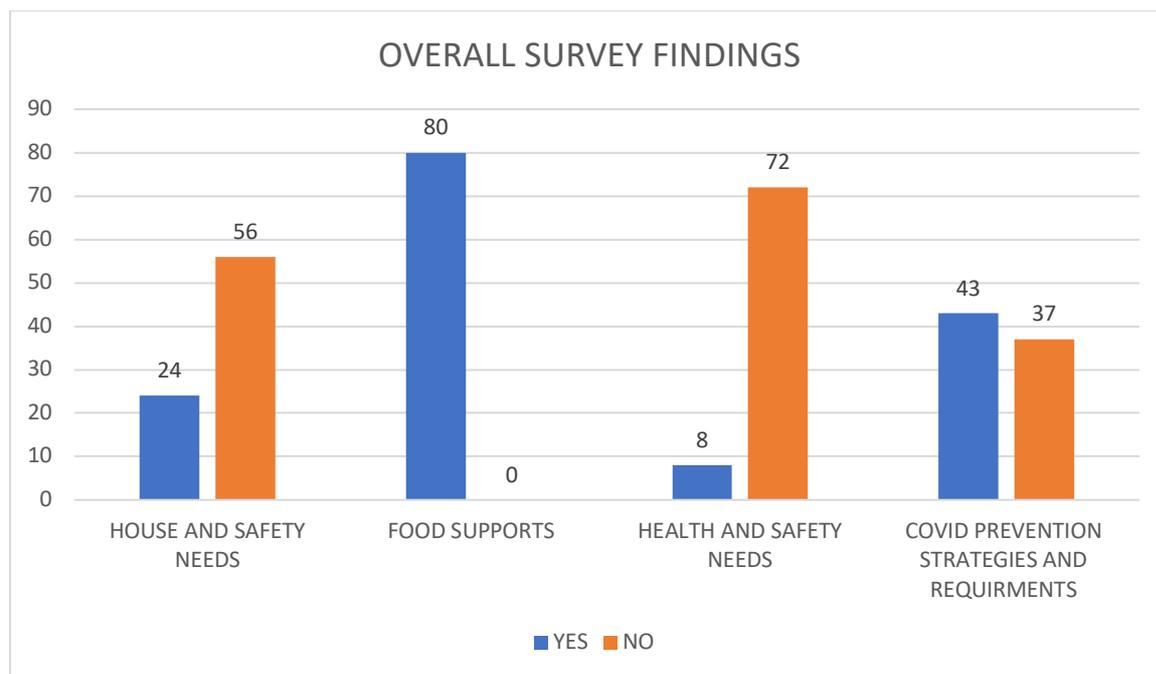
#### 2.4.4 MENTAL HEALTH WELL-BEING

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
In general, how would you rate your health?	12	63	5	-
	Yes	No	N/A	Comment
In the past 15 days, have you felt lonely?	22	58	-	
In the past 15 days, have you felt tense, anxious, or depressed?  If yes, have your thoughts and feeling interfered with your ability to carry on daily activities,	22	59		-Being in quarantine -In isolation -Living far away from family -less social connection -Work and study pressure -cultural shock

such as household tasks, work, social activities?	17	-	-	
Are there any issues or reasons that may indicate risk to your health and safety? If yes, provide details?	9 Panic attacks, Anxious and low self- esteem, Physical Health	71		
Do you have friends, families and social networks to engage? Are you living alone with little social contact?	<b>53</b>	<b>27</b>	-	Yes: Some of those who said yes also mentioned: They do have friends and/or family members but have little contact with them, meetings are occasional due to busy schedules, work, study
Would you like to involve in any groups or social activities?  If yes, what would be involved with- any ideas? (e.g., DBSV groups, women's groups, well-being)	<b>19</b>	<b>41</b>	-	20 (Not sure): Common reasons for No or not sure: Due classes and student placement, Moving interstate, Pregnant
	19	-	-	International Student Forum formed

During the survey, Nepalese international students were less likely to seek help for mental ill-health or even talk about it. These barriers can be compounded by stigma, a lack of understanding of mental health issues including support services. Being unsure where to go was also identified as a barrier to seeking help for international students. Difficulties accessing services, lack of understanding of the support services or hesitation to access support services due to language barrier or stigma attached with disclosure. Often it is found that international students are not very confident with the language and talking. English, being a second language, for most, it is very hard for them to communicate and express their feelings particularly for communicating concepts relating to mental health.

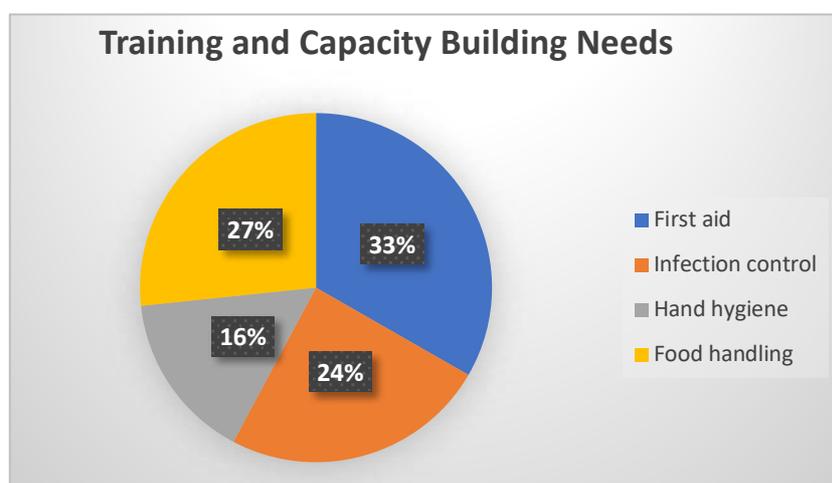
Overall, COVID-19 impacted every single student, more or less. But those who are young, casually employed and/or visa holders are likely to be suffering the most during the covid pandemic. The findings from the survey are extremely concerning and devastating.



	YES	NO	N/A	COMMENTS
House And Safety Needs	24	56		
Food Security Support Need	80	-	-	Food relief provided
Health And Safety Need	8	16		
Covid Prevention Strategies and Requirements	43	37	-	Hygiene products were provided to 43 individuals to meet infection control needs

### 2.4.5 TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING NEEDS

Through the project survey, DBSV team has identified following training and capacity building needs for the capacity building and professional development of the international students. This finding has given us a vision and recommendation for further action research projects.



**KEY OUTCOMES:** The COVID-19 pandemic has a profound impact, not only on people's health but also on how we work, live, study. Despite many obstacles, challenges and restrictions COVID-19 presented and imposed, we were able to stand strong those challenges and made tremendous accomplishments to serve our best for the great cause.

- ❖ Around 1000 community members including CALD community members, Nepalese international students, women and young people at high risk, were supported through our project. This project addressed their emergency needs, delivered culturally appropriate food reliefs, hygiene products and other essential items (to those affected by Covid-19).
- ❖ We distributed around 100 emergency food relief packages to people in need: those who lost jobs or had working hours reduced due to ongoing Covid restrictions including those who were in isolation, who tested positive or who were in quarantine;
- ❖ We provided and delivered fresh fruits, vegetables, groceries and essential items, hygiene products (hand wash, sanitiser, facemasks, cleaning spray) to support community members, especially those at high risks and who were more vulnerable due to Covid-19;
- ❖ Additional psychosocial and moral supports were provided as and when required, referrals were made, one to one support were provided to support vulnerable community members with mental health problems;
- ❖ Hundreds of homes cooked and community meals were provided and delivered to support community members, families and individuals, international students who were in need;
- ❖ Around 15 information sessions on Covid vaccine and vaccine roll-out program and vaccination support programs were organised to raise awareness among individuals, families and communities about Covid-19 and the vaccination program and to encourage every individual to get vaccinations; similarly, covid awareness videos, short clips, promotional materials, information sheets, health resources and communicational materials was delivered and disseminated via DBSV Facebook, viber group, YouTube, website, via emails, messages among our community networks;
- ❖ Around 70 community engagement activities, mental health and social well-being sessions, yoga, mindfulness, dance, virtual cultural celebration events, capacity building workshops, daily interactions and information sharing sessions were organised and delivered to keep community members appropriately engaged and supported

during coronavirus pandemic. Community members, individuals and international students seems more connected with our community engagement activities and programs and now more confident to seek and access support and feel supported and connected to each other;

- ❖ Self-support student Viber group of international students and 1 DBSV International Student Forum is formed (group of 12 international students for long term supports and interaction) to support and empower each other by interacting with each other, by sharing information and by facilitating student-based sessions.

## **PART THREE: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

### **3.1 ISSUES AND CHALLENGES:**

The dramatic rise in Covid positive cases in Victoria imposed a challenge and complex emergencies among the DBSV team. We were challenged with various uncertainties imposed by the Covid pandemic, the scope of which we could barely comprehend at some point. Many Nepalese community members including international students, were in isolation, some were tested positive and quarantined, started contacting the DBSV team for emergency supports including food relief and other essential supports. The significant rise in demand for food supports challenged the DBSV team in organising and delivering food reliefs in a short period. Determining the number of people in need of emergency assistance and the level of assistance required and keeping up-to-date with changes was particularly difficult in complex emergencies imposed by the Covid-19 restrictions. Despite these challenges, DBSV by building strong partnerships with volunteers, external stakeholders including food delivery partners was able to support people in need and those who are at high risks.

Covid-19 lockdown-imposed challenges for facilitating community engagement workshops and events including Covid-19 and vaccination information sessions. It was one of the challenges among the DBSV team to manage and organise various virtual sessions and events to engage and aware community members. For instance, in July we planned and organised 2 face to face COVID info Sessions in 2 Melbourne suburbs: Eastern and Northern; however, we had to postpone, plan, re-organise due to Victorian COVID lockdown. The sessions were delivered via Zoom but unfortunately expected participation was less.

Similarly, while we were involved in the survey (assessing risks of the student shared accommodation), we encountered some challenges. We were challenged while administering

our interview questionnaires. Those were the people we had never met before. It took some attributes to be able to get the work done. First, we had to be tactical in administering the questions than usual. Precautionary measures were taken, facemasks and face shields were used, the physical distance was maintained while interacting with students. This enhanced additional challenges while communicating and interviewing students. In brief, the following challenges were encountered during the survey:

- ❖ Difficulties making contacts or organising interviews due to Covid-19 restrictions and travel restrictions;
- ❖ Some of the interviewees do not feel comfortable disseminating personal information due to a lack of mutual trust and understanding at the beginning and even face shields and masks put additional challenges during the process and some refused to participate in the survey or to answer some of the survey questions;
- ❖ Ongoing Covid restrictions created barriers to successful data collection with a specified time limit as in some cases interviewees were not available at the scheduled time for the interview and had to postpone the time and day for the interview.

However, the DBSV team was always committed to serving the best. We accepted the challenge, followed the medical advice and continued serving and supporting in every possible way to enhance and maintain well-being and promote community engagement and maintain regular contact with each other in this volatile situation. Despite adversity and the challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic, DBSV pivoted and exhibited flexibility to respond quickly, particularly to serve and support the needs of our community members in need. We were always available to provide urgent support to international students and other community members who were affected by the COVID-19 crisis. In the face of challenge, each of our team members did and contributed what was needed to support the community in need and worked together. Also, the DBSV team kept on facilitating and initiating various sessions and engagement activities using various social media platforms and online mechanisms to engage communities remotely and to allow connection among community members.

### **3.2 OUR LEARNINGS AND EVALUATION**

Our learnings of this project are highlighted below:

1. Uncertain demands, the impact of uncertainties among community members: Covid-19 has taught us how the outbreak may have a huge impact on communities in terms of

access to essential goods and services, health, relationships and wellbeing. We are now more aware of how to react and what to do to support changes and uncertainties that minimize negative impacts and increase positive impact in people's life during crisis periods like Covid-19.

2. Importance of community engagement and reaching everyone during a pandemic: The engagement and relationship with our family, friends, groups and communities helped us to stay strong and positive during this crisis. We learned to stay connected and how staying connected helps us fight against any difficulties and how supporting connectivity maintain relationships that will be important for recovery.
3. Develop action plans and projects to support community members in need: We have gained lots of learnings and understanding for further action plans and projects to support vulnerable and high-risk community members and to develop resiliency and preparedness plan based on the identified needs of the team and of the community members and international students for further growth and development.
4. In the face of the challenge imposed by Covid-19, community organisations like ours made every effort and took every single step to support each individual in need and worked together over the immediate needs of communities. Hence, during the delivery of the project, we have explored and learned that community input and collaboration is essential, maintaining effective means of working with other community partners is needed as much as. We found that despite numerous challenges, we were able to successfully support our community members in need. We also found that the fundamental principles of meaningful and authentic stakeholder engagement were of paramount importance during the pandemic. This suggests that community partnerships must be fostered and sustained over so that when a crisis such as Covid-19 emerge, we all can build on existing trust and mutual respect. The lessons learned and the new approaches developed would be key in addressing any such future public emergencies.

### **Collaboration And Partnership with Partner Organisations Including Other Government Departments**

One of the reasons we were able to respond to community needs during this volatile time is because of the support from other external organisations engaged with providing relief supports. New partnerships and collaborations were developed during the pandemic, with many other organisations. Information and resources were shared among each other. Similarly, various approaches to critical incidents were shared and learned from other providers.

COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP	DESCRIPTION
<b>Victorian government (Multicultural Corona Virus team)</b>	Engagement in information sessions and forums organised by the Multicultural Coronavirus team.
<b>Department of Health (Vaccination Champions meetings)</b>	<p>Various online training and information session was organised and initiated where we were provided various vaccine-related information and strategies to boost our (vaccine champions) confidence in Covid vaccines awareness and promotion programs.</p> <p>Professionals working in the health sector, vaccine experts were invited to discuss topics around Covid-19 vaccines and strategies to promote vaccines awareness among our colleagues, friends, families and community members.</p>
<b>CIS Moreland (local community information and support services)</b>	<p>Working in partnership with CIS Moreland supported DBSV to provide additional relief needs and assisted communities to access foods and support services. With their supports, we were able to add additional services and meet the need the best we can.</p>
<b>NEAMI (Community-based organisation providing mental health services)</b>	<p>The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic also hugely affected the mental health of people. People were suddenly unemployed, and isolated. Mental health issues became a concerning issue during the pandemic. Many women and international students were devastated and began to seek supports. Working collaborates with NEAMI, referrals were made to them for further mental health supports and recovery. Also, DBSV provided various information session regarding mental health support services (led by Resika K.C, Social Worker, Service Manager, Neami National Northern Psychosocial Support Services) and</p>

	<p>developed an understanding on mental health and building resilience and getting professional help as required.</p>
<p><b>Food and Material Aid Network Group</b></p>	<p>Covid-19 relief and food network groups (group of food relief providers and emergency reliefs) of emergency relief sector working collaborate in partnership with each other, to deliver meals, culturally appropriately foods, hygiene products to people in need.</p> <p>The Network shared service and sector information and collective resources so localised community needs could be met. Services included emergency relief, information and referral, youth counselling, mental health and many more. The network groups also shared Covid-19 information, vaccine information and grant information.</p>
<p><b>Gulmi Samaj Victoria Australia</b></p>	<p>Gulmi Samaj Victoria Australia is a charitable organised established to support and help people in need in Australia as well as in Nepal. Various online session on vaccine information and community activities were organised and delivered in partnership with Gulmi Samaj.</p>
<p><b>eNepal (online news channel)</b></p>	<p>eNepal provided and disseminated various updates and information regarding DBSV’s emergency food reliefs, vaccination awareness programs, vaccination support programs among community members.</p>

## PART FOUR: CONCLUSION AND FEEDBACK

### 4.1 CONCLUSION:

The Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions imposed a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of people around Australia including migrants and international students. As a consequence, many Victorians requested emergency relief, leaving emergency relief organisations like ours's facing overwhelming demand for relief. However, with a strong determination to support community members in need, community organisations played a critical role in supporting health and wellbeing during this pandemic. With the support and funding from the Victorian Government, organizations like us including a diverse range of organisations, migrant and/or refugee organisations, voluntary based organisations, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander organisations, social enterprises were able to provide culturally appropriate reliefs and supports to their community members in need. Didi Bahini Samaj Victoria also stood strong and played a generous role in supporting Nepalese community members and international students during this crisis period. With our ongoing dedication and commitments, we were able to support more than 100 people with food reliefs, and emergency support services out of which around 80 were Nepalese international students.

Hence, this report highlights the key findings and provides details of lived experiences of international students living in a shared accommodation including risks and immediate support needs during the Covid pandemic. In addition, the report also highlights the range of issues impacting the ability to access basic needs, physical safety and mental health of international students including social isolation and loneliness, stress regarding job, income, and cultural barriers to conceptualising mental health and physical safety concerns. Besides, the report also describes challenges experienced in delivering services and supports in response to international student mental health and physical safety issues.

**Some of the significant changes that occurred as a result of our project are:**

1. Community members, individuals, families, international students are now more connected with each other. Our community engagement activities and forums provided multiple opportunities to interact, connect and engage with each other. People are now more connected and attached (physically and emotionally) and are now more confident and comfortable to seek support when needed. They are now aware of whom to contact and how to approach for help when needed.
2. Similarly, with the international student forum and Viber support group, international students are now more connected with each other. Daily communication, interaction, exchange of messages, interaction in burning issues, employment opportunities are exchanged and shared via the group.
3. Community members are now more conscious about their physical and mental health with our well-being awareness sessions. We have been noticing changes in behaviours, lifestyles, balanced diets to maintain and live a healthy life. With our healthy living approaches and programs people are now more engaged in doing physical activities (walking, running, hooping), yoga and mindfulness session, meditation and now are more focused on enhancing wellbeing, and overall promoting quality of life.
4. With our mental health awareness session and campaign activities, people are now more aware of the significance of wellbeing and mental health. Our sessions presented the opportunity to explore and discuss mental health issues and provided participants with an opportunity to connect. The enlightening aspects of the workshop supported mental health literacy and achieving better awareness of mental health support services and how to access supports. Community members seemed more aware of mental health problems and to get professional supports for the problems.
5. As we were actively engaged in responding to the urgent need and support calls as quickly as possible, now community members have faith and confidence that community organisation has a big role and responsibility to play during the crisis period. People including international students are now more engaged and showing their interest to be connected with our organisation to serve the best.
6. With our vaccination awareness sessions, promotional materials, videos, resources, information sheets, messages, interactions, community members were more aware of the importance of vaccination and vaccination roll-out programs. Lots of queries and concerns were raised and our team were actively engaged in answering all queries and concerns. This supported community members to be aware of vaccination and where to access vaccination. Additionally, our vaccination support programs helped and supported our senior parents (who are on a visit visa), international students, vulnerable community members, women to get vaccinated during urgency.

## 4.2 FEEDBACK:

Experiences and learnings throughout the project have numerous positive and good instances; the story of success and many unstoppable attempts to address challenges and develop initiatives, services and programs to support community members in need including women and international students at risk. With our ongoing dedication and commitments to serve communities and to make positive impacts in people's life we were always there for supporting the mental health and physical safety of international students; enhance connections and belonging; build Covid-19 and vaccination education and awareness including mental health and physical safety literacy and awareness; prevention and early identification of risk or emerging issues; promoting and facilitating access to supports in the community; designing and delivering culturally appropriate emergency responses. The funding provided by the Victorian Government for the emergency food relief sector helped DBSV to make greater efforts to address and assess determinants of mental health or risks to physical safety (such as employment, food, financial and housing) and to take action as required.

During this whole time, forums and sessions led by DFFH and the Victorian Multicultural team played an essential role to keep us updated and informed regarding the project purposes, expectations and our goals by making support and services information more accessible and integrated; providing specific and various forums for fund grantees and sharing knowledge and resources relevant to the context. Furthermore, opportunities for coordination, building and enhancing the peer support workforce can also be counted as a positive experience gained throughout the project.

Similarly, DBSV received positive feedbacks and messages from our community members. DBSV and our team were recognised as a regular point of contact for any kind of emergency supports or for any information on vaccines and vaccine roll-out program. Overall, the feedback, messages from our community members, individuals, families to whom we were able to support during this crisis period specifies a high level of happiness and gratitude. There were many positive remarks about our community engagement activities, virtual events, information sessions and support programs.

Fri, 27 Aug, 6:43 pm

Thank you so much for your support



Huss ,thanks a lot for ur support  
That would be great n thanks didi  
bahahini samaj ❤️🙏🙏

**Bhima Kandel Nanu is with Didi Bahini Samaj Victoria and Barsha KC.**  
 8 Sep · 🌐

🙏🙏🙏 thank you Didi Bahini Samaj Victoria for this special, unforgettable and valuable surprise teej dar and gift .it makes me really joyful.thank you once again and happy teej to all of you. special thanks to barsha kc didi! ❤️❤️



**Anju Shrestha is with Annieta Bhandari.**  
 8 Sep · 🌐

Thank you so much Didi Bahini Samaj Victoria for this wonderful daar..I still consider myself a postnatal mom so its a perfect daar for me..Despite being in lockdown, got this from our sisters, so really blessed.

Happy teej in advance ❤️❤️.



sure thank you

Mon, 1 Nov, 5:45 pm

Thank you very much Anita jee ,Rita and entire Didi bahini samaj .

