



6th August 2020

Businesses unite to ease the burden for Australians experiencing vulnerability

AGL, the Commonwealth Bank, Telstra, Transurban, and Yarra Valley Water have provided seed funding to develop and pilot a unique online portal with Thriving Communities Partnership and the community sector, that will make it easier for Australians experiencing vulnerability to connect and access support services.

The Australian-first digital platform - One Stop One Story Hub - will be delivered by mid 2021 and will allow people to connect to the extensive support they are eligible for across a range of essential service sectors, instead of needing to individually contact and navigate the systems of each organisation.

Thriving Communities Partnership CEO, Ciara Sterling, said: "It's unusual for five companies from across different sectors to unite around common customers experiencing vulnerability in partnership with the community sector. We see industry initiatives, and bi-lateral partnerships but what these organisations have committed to is leading and innovative."

In Australia, the cumulative financial impacts of this year's bushfires and the coronavirus are currently being likened to that of the Great Depression. The unemployment rate rose to a two-decade high in June at 7.4 per cent. As many as 1.8 million Australians are underemployed, and long-term solutions are needed to help people maintain access to essential services in this difficult period.

Thriving Communities Partnership, Chief Advocate, Tim Costello said he would like to see more organisations become part of the One Stop One Story Hub. "The only way to build a strong recovery, is to build a strong recovery together. When organisations collaborate and work well together, we have a better chance of ensuring access to essentials for all Australians. The One Stop One Story Hub is a positive example of this, and we need to see more organisations getting involved."

Prior to the coronavirus and bushfires, 13 per cent of Australians were experiencing severe financial stress every year, but less than one per cent were accessing corporate support services. This is largely because having to contact each service provider individually to access support can be an undignified and traumatic process.

Financial Counselling Australia CEO, Fiona Guthrie, welcomes the initiative: "The One Stop One Story Hub will make getting in touch so much easier and will encourage people to act earlier. The Hub is a very practical initiative, because the earlier you act, the more options you have."

The One Stop One Story Hub will allow people to contact one organisation seeking support and they will then have the option of having a referral made which will eliminate the need to repeat their story to different organisations. Businesses will also be able to share information with the customer about other support that is available.

Ms Guthrie also commended the benefit for her sector. "When completed, this new Hub will be a great resource for financial counsellors and their clients, and it's great to see so many organisations coming together to make this happen."

Australian businesses are being urged to join a growing number of organisations that will use the One Stop One Story Hub and can find out more at www.thriving.org.au.

The Thriving Communities Partnership works across sectors including government, corporate and community and

supports its members to come together and adapt organisational policies and practices to support those experiencing vulnerability.

Partner quotes in support of the One Stop One Story Hub:

Yarra Valley Water Managing Director, Pat McCafferty:

“The promise of this Hub is a more effective, holistic and dignified approach to providing a helping hand to those in need in our community – any of us, with a change of circumstances, could find ourselves in need of such support.”

AGL General Manager of Customer Experience and Advocacy, David Bland:

“Energy represents only one part of the household budget, so connecting people in financial stress to support from multiple organisations gives them a greater chance of getting on top of things over the long term.”

Commonwealth Bank General Manager of Community and Customer Vulnerability, Catherine Fitzpatrick:

“Every day, our customers in some of the most vulnerable circumstances tell us their most personal stories, which can be extremely challenging, and in some cases very traumatic. The ability for these people to tell their story once would be a huge support as they navigate what is already a very difficult time in their lives.”

Telstra Principal of Strategy and Inclusion, Michael Parks:

“We have seen the benefits in working together across all sectors, and that cooperation is needed now more than ever to help people who have been impacted by the pandemic. It’ll mean that society and the economy can recover quicker and customers will have the support they need.”

Transurban Customer and Communities Advocate, Jane Calvert:

“People are looking for companies to support customers going through difficult times, and the same people who use our toll roads also use services like utilities and banks. We know that if someone is finding it difficult to pay for toll road travel, it’s often only one piece of the puzzle and they may have more significant bills or welfare issues they need support with. That’s where the One Stop One Story Hub comes in.”