

Suggestions for an Effective Community Response: Covid-19

Main Challenges Facing the leaders of Jewish communities

- Providing key communal services while protecting the safety of community members and operating within official health guidelines.
- Safeguarding the physical wellbeing of members who are in institutions under the responsibility of the community (old age homes, schools, other community institutions)
- Providing various needs to community members as a result of the situation (physical, social psychological, and informational)
- Strengthening the resilience and preparedness of the community to deal with the crisis and its aftermath

Possible Action Points and Principles for Meeting the Challenges

- **Community emergency management team** - If your community does not have such a team, it is suggested to form a designated taskforce. The team should include Lay and Professional leaders, including representatives from social welfare, security, religious and formal/non formal education departments and main community institutions. The role of this team is to conduct an ongoing assessment of the situation, determine relevant issues and community needs, construct, coordinate and implement a community response plan
- **Don't deal with this alone!** - In situations like this, leaders will be dealing with many complex issues, will need to analyze vast and often conflicting information, to set difficult priorities. and make many quick decisions in times of high anxiety. This cannot be done by one person or even a small group.
- **A marathon and not a sprint** - It seems likely that this crisis is going to be a long, ongoing situation. Leaders should set aside time to rest and be with their family. If not, they are at risk to **burn-out** and might not be available to the community when they are most needed. We highly recommend that, as much as possible, the leader shares the burden and delegates non-critical activities to others.
- **An opportunity to recruit community members** - This can be **an opportunity** to recruit community members with high management skills who have been less involved in community affairs. It's a good idea to try to also recruit **young adults** to reinforce your management team.
- **Continuous connection to relevant government departments** – it is recommended to set up mechanisms to receive important updates in official policies and guidelines that may have consequences for the community. It is important to discuss with official's regarding unique community needs (religious matters, kosher food, funerals etc.) and to know what benefits and assistance is available for community members.

- **Compliance of official policy, guidelines and directives** – It is important to ensure that all current community activities are conducted in-line with official policy guidelines and directives.
- **The importance of being proactive** – in every community there are community members who are more vulnerable and more likely to require assistance. **Map out these populations and actively reach out to them!** Understand the unique needs of each group and form plans to respond to these needs in accord with community resources and local guidelines and policies.

Vulnerable Community Members:

The following are members at a higher level of vulnerability:

- Individuals inflicted by the virus, and their families
- Individuals who are considered at-risk (elderly, chronically ill)
- Individuals in isolation as a result of possible exposure to the virus
- Populations that are in areas perceived as “hot spots”
- Community members with special needs (members with physical or cognitive disabilities, single parents, new immigrants etc.)
- Populations that are marginalized and/or with weaker social networks

- **Accessible to community members in need** – it is important for **all** community members to know that in time of need they can turn to the community. It is important that they understand what types of assistance they can receive and how to make contact. This is especially important for less active/connected members and/or for those not used to turning to the community for assistance. Try to publish this information as widely as possible, utilizing various methods of communication (not all community members are signed up to community newsletters or Facebook pages). If possible, set up a **community hot line** and/or other methods of letting members receive information and getting in touch (telephones, emails, WhatsApp etc.) and, most important, **be responsive**.
- **Community services** – We suggest that you analyze the impact of current and future restrictions and the member perceptions on the provision of critical community services, such as – prayers, education, kosher food, mikva, funerals etc. **Try to identify and/or devise alternative methods of providing these services, in accordance with official guidelines.** The power of the internet and social media are excellent tools but remember that it is not accessible for all members. Try to be as creative and flexible as possible. Seek out best practices from other communities and organizations

- **Mobilize Volunteers** – It is recommended to build up a pool of community volunteers, with an emphasis on young adults, who are motivated and capable of assisting in supporting community members in need. It is important that these volunteers operate within the boundaries of the official guidelines and that they are provided with all possible protective equipment.

Main roles for volunteers:

- Visiting and delivering provisions to elderly, isolated or ill community members
- Helping with logistic matters – such as buying food or medicine, making care packages, transportation
- Helping to operate community hot lines
- Assisting in updating community communications on social media
- Reinforcing the community emergency management team
- Professional volunteers - Assisting in providing community services – educators,

- **Community anxiety** - Help community members deal with their anxiety:
 - a. Encourage and promote mutual assistance and supporting one-another
 - b. Ensure ongoing contact and provide support for single/isolated members or those with weaker social networks. It could be a daily phone call to “check-in” on how they are doing, or visits by volunteers, etc
 - c. Involve Rabbis and religious leadership as needed. They can conduct personal conversations, post a video with a spiritual message, invite members to share concerns, etc
 - d. Provide psycho-social support as required – visits (if possible), proactive telephone calls, hot lines, psycho-educational materials, guides for parents etc.
- **Communications** - Utilize community databases and communication tools (community web site, Facebook, skype, Instagram, newsletters, papers etc.) to update and share relevant and trusted information with community members. These communications could include:
 - a. Official government information and guidelines
 - b. Information about communal activities and services
 - c. Messages and tips to support community members

It is important to translate all materials into the languages spoken by community members – as often this is not done by local authorities.