

An Important Message to Our Members

The decision as to whether we resume EU3A classes in term 4 has been one of the toughest the Management Committee has had to make in recent times. We have reluctantly decided that we will NOT be resuming operations until 2022 and we want the membership to know and understand how and why we came to this decision.

The last year and a half has been a great unknown with the arrival of COVID-19 which in turn morphed into the highly contagious Delta variant. Nobody knows for certain what tomorrow will bring, much less months in advance. The Management Committee have worked very hard to steer the organisation through these uncharted waters. We have listened carefully to the health advice from Dr Kerry Chant, NSW Chief Health Officer and to Dr David Durrheim, Professor of Public Health Medicine at Newcastle University and Director-Health Protection, Hunter New England Health, as well as following the restrictions mandated by the Premier, Gladys Berejiklian.

Some of the issues that were taken into consideration in our decision were:-

- ◆ **A RISK ASSESSMENT of what may occur when Greater Sydney is freed from lockdown.** Premier Berejiklian expects the COVID-19 positive numbers to “go through the roof” once restrictions are eased. Dr Durrheim is very concerned with local rising numbers and the comparatively lower percentage of full vaccinations in the Hunter and Lake Macquarie region. Release from lockdown when the State reaches 70% fully vaccinated may not mean that our local population are at that same level.
- ◆ **LEADERS’ preparedness to return to class.** Judy, the Course Coordinator, Anne, Leaders Liaison and Annette, Web and Publicity Coordinator, have put in many hours surveying and speaking to Leaders and have established that over a third of our leaders are not willing or don’t think it is practical or safe for their classes to return. Many of the Leaders who expressed a willingness to return also qualified their answer with a proviso that the COVID numbers be ‘under control’. A number of leaders expressed the view that the nature of their groups meant they could not ensure the 4 square metre rule could be enforced or that mask wearing was too restrictive for their activity.
- ◆ **Issues with VENUES (other than BSCC).** Our classes are held in a wide range of spaces including public libraries, church halls and Sporting & Social Clubs. Many of these did not open for us in our preparation for term 3 and it is clear they will be either unavailable or severely restricted when lockdown ends. Local clubs for example are only allowing members to return in controlled numbers and libraries are working on a click-and-collect basis. The end of lockdown will NOT mean the end of restrictions that will affect us.
- ◆ **Limits on CLASS SIZES.** There will be a limit of only 20 people allowed in ANY exercise/dance class. Most of our classes have more than 20 people on the roll. Singing will still NOT be permitted – it is always the last to come back. All of this leads to what the Management Committee sees as **SIGNIFICANT INEQUITY** for some members who may not be able to resume while others can.
- ◆ **The impact of a POTENTIAL COVID CASE among us.** The emotional cost if one of our members presented with COVID in one of our classes or at our hall would be significant. No one on our Management Team feels comfortable with the thought that this could happen within our organisation if we resume now. Indeed, we feel that is our duty of care to do all we can to ensure that our operations don’t contribute to the larger problem. We have also consulted with local professionals and established that the cost of professionally deep cleaning the hall would be \$1650.00.

As you can appreciate, the decision hasn’t been an easy one. We know that many of our members are very keen to get back to classes and we understand your frustration – but we simply feel that the risk, on so many levels, is too great at this time.

Meanwhile, we encourage you all to keep your friendship connections that you have made in Eastlakes U3A alive and take advantage of the easing of restrictions in any way that supports your social and emotional needs.

We know that COVID is going to be with us for a long while yet so please consider your readiness to return next year by heeding the advice on vaccinations that will protect all of us and ensure we can all benefit from the new “freedoms” they offer.

Management Committee - Eastlakes U3A