

Coronavirus Australia: Sex workers fear being left out of lockdown reopening plans

Sex workers are concerned the Government has no plans to let them get back to one-on-one work as lockdown restrictions ease. Warning: GRAPHIC.



Benedict Brook

[@BenedictBrook](#)

12 comments

MAY 11, 2020 10:19AM

Video

Image

Australia's three step plan to get back to some degree of normalcy has worried workers in the oldest profession with brothels explicitly excluded from reopening plans and concerns one-on-one sex work may be locked out of the country's post-lockdown economy.

It's been called a "slap in the face," by the peak body for sex workers.

Not that bringing the industry back doesn't have its challenges says Eva, a sex worker from Brisbane.

"It's pretty hard to stay 1.5m away if you're doing contact sex work."

Like many sex workers, she has now moved her business online. Others are offering a range of non-contact products from sexting to "virtual girlfriend" experiences. But

the income is nothing like physical work.

Sex workers insist they can function face-to-face with clients in the time of coronavirus. But some services may have to stay off the menu for the time being.

It seems “ludicrous,” said Eva, that remedial massage is now allowed, but sexual massage is not.

“Hand relief as part of a massage makes no difference, especially if you’re using gloves or condoms,” she said.

RELATED: [Three-stage plan to ease COVID-19 restrictions](#)

RELATED: [Follow the latest coronavirus updates](#)

Eva, like almost everyone in the sex work industry, has seen her takings plummet.

In early March she noticed some clients were making bookings with the caveat that if either of them had the merest hint of a sniffle they could cancel. Then the bookings dried up completely.

“A lot of workers didn’t feel right to work and a lot of clients didn’t feel it was the right time to seek out services,” she told news.com.au.



The sex work industry has been ‘devastated’ by COVID-19, say advocates. Picture: Daily Telegraph Source: News Limited

Jules Kim, the chief executive officer of the Scarlet Alliance, the Australian sex workers’ association, said the industry had been rocked by COVID-19.

“Coronavirus has had a devastating impact. The varying legality of sex work across Australia, the inability of some workers to access government support and the stigma attached to the industry has made it difficult for some to access financial support.”

Some sex workers, for instance, hadn’t accessed JobKeeper as they were concerned about revealing their career to Centrelink staff.

There have also been reports of police making unannounced calls to sex workers’ homes demanding they prove they were not working. That’s rattled some workers who had no idea police had their address on file.

WORKING MY BUTT OFF ONLINE

A 31-year-old private sex worker from the Blue Mountains, west of Sydney, who goes by the name of Jenna Love told news.com.au she already had an established “side hustle” of offering online services.

“I’m an adult content creator, which is a polite way of saying I make porn.

“I’m a bit of an exhibitionist so it’s something I really enjoy. It was a bit of money on the side; now it’s my main source of income.”

Jenna said she has expanded her online service to include video calls, sexting and even non-sexual virtual girlfriend experiences.

“They might get a message from me in the morning about my day, or selfies of me doing the laundry. It’s much more mundane but companionship is what a lot of people need now,” she said.

“One thing that’s a surprise hit is men sending me a photo or videos of their dicks and I rate them. I’ve been sent countless dick pics in the past but now I get paid to see them.”



Jenna Love, a sex worker from the Blue Mountains, says there are ways sex work can exist even with coronavirus.

Picture: Curvateur Photo Source: *Supplied*

Despite all the creativity, it doesn't make ends meet. Jenna estimated only 25 per cent of her pre-pandemic income came from online work with the rest face-to-face clients.

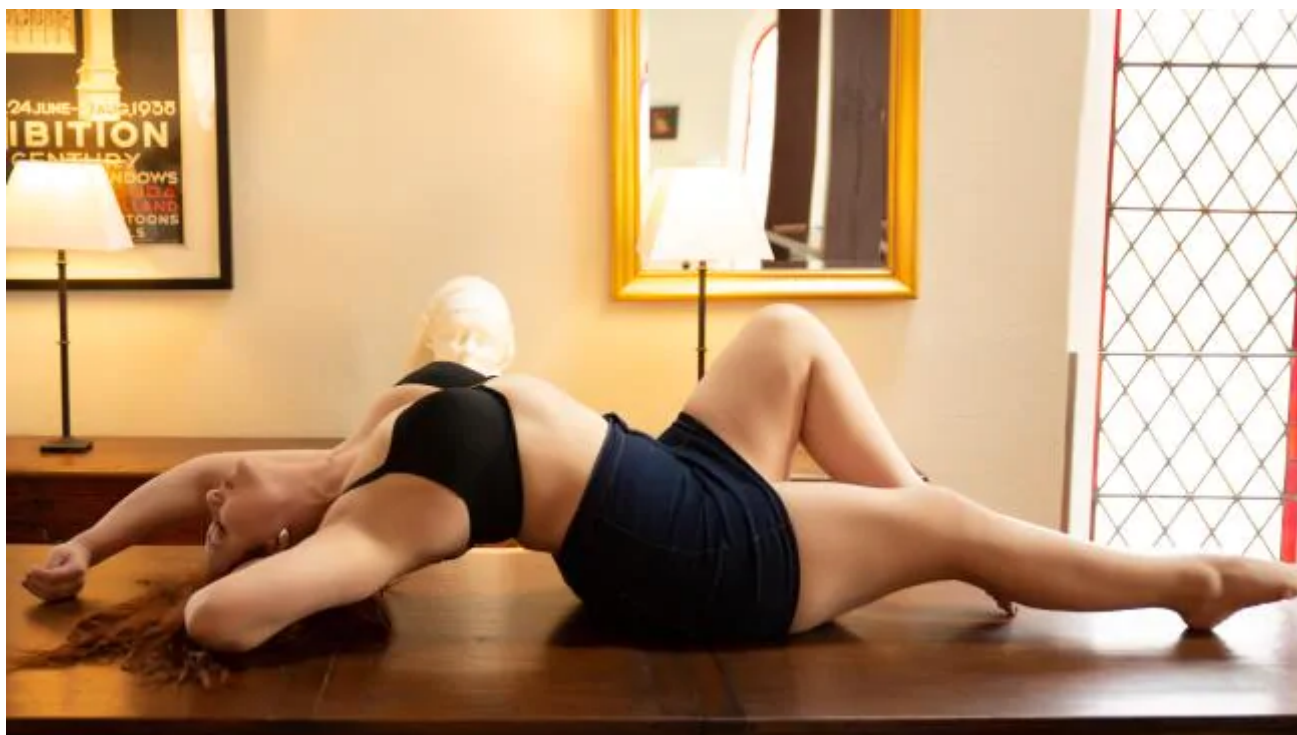
"I've been working my butt off over the last two months and the pay-off is there but nowhere near what I was able to earn before.

"I'm incredibly privileged that I can access JobKeeper and have a husband who is bringing in a wage but without those things there would be a problem."

Jenna said the online space was already saturated and sex workers who had previously only met clients one-on-one, such as in brothels, couldn't easily make a sudden switch.

Eva said she had done some online work since the pandemic began but was uncomfortable about sharing images online that could end up being distributed further.

"Luckily for me I started a 'muggle' job at the same time as COVID so I haven't had to rely on sex work," she said.



Jenna has turned to online services and is even a 'virtual girlfriend' but it doesn't make up for the income from one-on-one work. Picture: Curvateur Photo Source: Supplied

SEX WORKERS STRUGGLING

The Scarlet Alliance has launched a [fundraising drive to provide emergency support for sex workers](#) thrust onto the headline, some of who have little savings, holiday pay of supportive family to fall back on. Migrant sex workers are often even worse off.

“We give out funds every week but we’ve only been able to help 25 per cent of applicants and the need is exceeding available funds,” Ms Kim said.

Ms Kim said it was “incredibly disappointing” that brothels and strip clubs would be forced to remain shut even when Australia reaches the stage three loosening of restrictions.

“It’s a further slap in the face for sex workers who are already struggling with no end in sight.

“Sex workers have a great track record in relation to public health in Australia, demonstrated through many years of low rates of blood borne viruses and sexually transmitted infections and high rates of testing.

“This is all completely ignored by the Federal Government.”

Ms Kim appealed to “progressive” states and territories to take a “pragmatic approach”.



Jules Kim from sex work organisation Scarlet Alliance says she is concerned the industry will be left behind as restrictions are eased despite measures that can be taken to limit the virus' spread. *Source:Supplied*

REMEDIAL MASSAGE YES, SENSUAL MASSAGE NO

The industry points to other contact activities being progressively allowed including some cosmetic procedures, dentistry and remedial massage.

“I’m not saying tomorrow we all need to go out on the street and solicit everyone but if restrictions for other industries are lifted then they should be for us,” Jenna said.

“Sensual massage is almost identical to remedial massage. The only difference is the stigma attached to sex work.”

She said if anything sex workers were more aware of health and hygiene than people in most other industries.

“Cleanliness and health are at the top of our minds. If we don’t maintain our hygiene that affects our ability to work, our reputation and livelihoods.

“If you could only see our laundry bills. We go through plenty of sheet and towels.”

The reality was people were going to – were still even during lockdown – getting up close and personal with strangers so why not let the regulated sex industry start cranking up again, she said?

“Plenty of people are on Tinder each night.”

WHAT'S OFF THE LIST OF SERVICES

Eva said there was a misapprehension about sex workers. Even at her busiest she might only see three or four clients a week, coming into contact with far fewer people than those working in an office, for instance.

Hairdressers have been able to work and despite getting close to clients, there has been no transmission in salons.



A floor show is unlikely to give anyone coronavirus. *Source: News Limited*

WHAT YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO DO

There has been a study that has suggested [semen could harbour coronavirus](#). However, it's only been found in people with severe symptoms and it's not clear it's transmissible – there's no evidence of anyone catching the virus other than through the air.

Ensuring all services were clean and anyone who they worked had no symptoms were all ways of minimising risk.

Despite that, the intimacy of sex work meant there would still have to be changes, the industry concedes.

“Kissing is going to be a high-risk activity so that won't happen,” Eva said.

Oral sex might also be off the menu for a time, too. “But otherwise, there's nothing you do during sex that aerosolises a virus,” Eva said.

For Jenna face masks were a no-no during sex.

“I got into sex work because I love connecting with people on a face-to-face level. I’d rather abstain than use a face mask.”

But she urged governments, when they were making decisions on restrictions, to look beyond the industry simply being about sex. Clients included people with disabilities, low social skills and the chronically lonely.

“People go to a dentist because they need clean teeth; but people also need to be able to connect with others on an intimate level.

“Sex isn’t a need, but human connection is.”