

Coronavirus crisis: Sex workers impacted, brothels told to shut

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DIFFICULT TIMES: Wagga's sex workers have to protect their physical and economic health amid the coronavirus pandemic. Picture: Emma Hillier

Sex workers are likely to be hit hard by the coronavirus downturn as social distancing restrictions mean they are unable to ply their main trade.

The sex industry, already under threat from the virus, is now scrambling to deal with new regulations after adult entertainment venues around the country were instructed to close their doors at midnight on Wednesday.

Wagga madam Gypsy Rose told *The Daily Advertiser* she was in "damage control", but her brothel was "no different to every other poor business in Wagga".

"I think, like the rest of Australia, working girls they get it's happening and there's nothing we can do about it besides go with it," Ms Rose said.

"Are they anxious and scared? Yeah, we are ... Some girls will be homeless."

Ms Rose said she was fighting to keep her establishment Gypsy's Kittens and Cougars - which has had to close - afloat by promoting a live-streaming service.

She has four to six local women on her books, some of whom are supporting themselves while in between other jobs or studying.

"In the last few weeks, obviously, there's been a drastic downturn ... us being in Wagga coming off the back of the drought hasn't helped. It [coronavirus] sort of hit us with a double whammy really," Ms Rose said.

"I don't think there's gonna be any business relief, tax relief or anything for us because I don't think people really think we deserve it."

Ms Rose said people in the sex industry, particularly brothel owners, were not supported adequately by the government despite paying tax.

Sex workers around Australia are being encouraged by industry bodies to lodge an intent to claim government assistance, though many will be unable to access financial support for a variety of reasons.

Sex Workers Outreach Project NSW CEO Cameron Cox said sex workers could "fall through the cracks", many of whom are "doubly or triply marginalised".

"There are people who aren't residents ... a lot of sex workers are migrants who won't have access to financial support," Mr Cox said.

"They've got children to look after, they've got aged parents. We're not just the one thing."

In Sydney yesterday the owner of a massage parlour was fined \$5000 for continuing to operate and three staff members were each fined \$1000.

"We understand where the police were coming from ... but we know from long experience, and especially experience during the HIV pandemic which sex workers handled very well, that criminalisation doesn't work in the long term," Mr Cox said.

Scarlet Alliance, the peak Australian sex workers association, has started an emergency fundraiser with its partner organisations for sex workers affected by the COVID-19 economic crisis.

"Our profession [shouldn't] stand in the way as to whether we deserve help or not. Because your profession doesn't say anything about who you are," Ms Rose said.

This story [Sex workers caught in COVID-19 downturn](#) first appeared on [The Daily Advertiser](#).