The Formentera Department of Social Welfare reports that as the public health crisis continues to unfold, some 700 islanders receive support from the department's range of services.

Social welfare conseller Rafael Ramírez noted that as an essential service, FDSW has remained operational, pointing out that "departmental reorganisation occured even before the state of alarm was invoked, when the adult day care centre and local seniors' clubs were shuttered". "Our entire staff is standing by ready to assist in the protection of residents", said Ramírez, who affirmed that personnel "act in lockstep with health ministry recommendations and instructions regarding keeping staff and islanders safe".

New support service for the aged

FDSW works on a number of fronts in service of the most vulnerable. Take for instance a new service offering assistance to old people on the island outside the department's traditional network of clients. Poring over Formentera's register of inhabitants and membership rolls of the island's elderly clubs, staff have contacted a total of 265 individuals, reaching out to 370 out-of-network local seniors to check how they are doing and whether they need help. What's more, from law enforcement agencies and the healthcare system to varying branches of the local administration and beyond, collaboration has cut across government and services to ensure FDSW can follow the cases that require attention.

Help at home

Responsible for evaluating and monitoring the home assistance programme (*Servei d'Atenció Domiciliària*, or SAD), FDSW staff have retooled the service to keep it functional even as essential safety measures are adopted to protect SAD's beneficiaries and employees. Today 14 islanders in 11 homes benefit from the service; before the state of alarm the number was 22. Weekly telephone calls help staff stay connected with individuals not currently using SAD so staff can stay abreast of changes and determine whether a reactivation of the service would be appropriate.

Phone contact is also made once a week with islanders who in the past obtained mental health treatment, which is part of the department's catalogue of basic services. Before the state of alarm, the service claimed seven users; the number is now six, of whom, four are contacted weekly and two biweekly.

Food vouchers
Also among the department's basic services are food vouchers, the demand for which has swelled since the start of the health crisis. Compared to one year ago, voucher deliveries in March grew from 31 to 68 (an upswing of 119%) while the number of islanders obtaining vouchers went from 13 to 21 (a 62% spike). This month's figures remain provisional, but to date 77 vouchers have gone out compared to 32 during the entire month of April 2019 (a 140% increase), while the number of recipients has climbed from 12 to 47 (a 292% jump). Based on the current trend, the month of April could see as much as a five-fold increase in voucher recipients. Two-hundred thirty-seven vouchers were handed out in 2019, while 187 have already been distributed so far in 2020.

Adult care facility
Though the doors of the Formentera's Centre de Dia have been closed to the public since 13 March, the care centre's nurse, psychologist, social worker, physiotherapist and director are monitoring clients' cases over the phone to offer help to families and principal carers and decide whether more comprehensive home support such as meal delivery is in order. Hygiene assistance and daily therapeutic walks, both at-home services, have been activated already. Minimum once weekly telephone support is maintained with 36 individuals, and only one of the centre's typical attendees has requested meal delivery.

Gender violence support
The Consell de Formentera wishes to remind islanders that the risk of gender, domestic and sexual violence can mount during periods of home confinement. "This is why", said Ramírez, "measures to prevent, control and minimise the negative consequences of home confinement are so important for the lives of many of these victims".

In an effort to ensure comprehensive support for people who experience gender violence, FDSW offers 24-hour information and telephone support (the Balearic Women's Institute, IBdona, can be reached at 016, 112 and 971 17 89 89; the WhatsApp number is 639 83 74 76), 24-hour emergency in-person help, shelter service for women who are not safe at home and mental health support.

Protection of minors
To keep at-risk youth safe, FDSW establishes mostly telephone contact with families which, in light of their particular characteristics, are considered likely candidates for such assistance. Staff carry out Skype interviews with specific families and coordinate via Hangouts and Zoom with stakeholders in other structures involved in youth development, care and intervention. FDSW currently has 97 open files in its caseload, 30% of which are classed as critical and requiring

contact 3-4 times a week. For the remaining portion, classed as moderate or minor, contact is made once or twice a week.

Phone support

The Red Cross, which manages telephone support for Formentera, has been contacting 161 service beneficiaries weekly (a third round of calls was completed this week). No one on Formentera expressed the need for outside social services support. The dependence support division of the Balearic Islands' social affairs ministry monitors 141 individuals with a recognised degree of dependence.

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Department of Communications
Consell de Formentera