



Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission Regulatory Response to COVID-19

Statement from Ms Janet Anderson PSM, Aged Care Quality and Safety Commissioner

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the community is looking for reassurance that older people receiving aged care will be well looked after and will be kept safe.

The Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission is squarely focused on this priority. We remain on duty and determined to continue fulfilling our statutory obligations to protect the safety, health, wellbeing and quality of life of aged care consumers.

We have published on our website our proportionate, risk-based approach in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our regulatory response aims to minimise infection risks to consumers, staff and the Commission's own employees. This means adjusting our regulatory activities and focusing additional effort where it is needed most to ensure that aged care consumers are safe.

The Commission's current regulatory focus includes:

- continuing to closely manage complaints about aged care services including those related to COVID-19, and escalating matters for regulatory action based on risk. The Commission has received more than 1,800 calls during March which is up from 1,298 in February;
- conducting site visits to services assessed as high risk in relation to infection control. These visits are conducted when considered absolutely necessary based on assessed risk;
- where services have non-compliance with the required standards, using our regulatory tools and sanctions to closely monitor their return to compliance;
- contacting all aged care approved providers by telephone to monitor their preparation for a COVID-19 outbreak and manage visitor restrictions in line with the Communicable Diseases Network of Australia (CDNA) infection control guidelines and the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) advice on visits to vulnerable groups including residential aged care services;
- conducting an online survey of all aged care residential and home care services, asking them key questions about their preparedness for COVID-19 based on the CDNA and AHPPC guidelines;
- conducting roundtables with provider and consumer representatives to share information about issues and brainstorm solutions;
- developing resources and tools to assist aged care service providers in responding to the COVID-19 outbreak including posters and letter templates;
- developing an approach to directly engage with consumers about their experience of the quality of care and services they are receiving including the impact of the current COVID-19 pandemic.



Regarding the restrictions on visitors that have been introduced by the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments, the Commission expects aged care services to fully implement the new provisions. These provisions are important for protecting residents and staff and reducing the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

At the same time, it is vital that the new provisions are implemented with compassion and care. Consumers, their families and the wider community expect and deserve this. Aged care providers should be drawing on the Aged Care Quality Standards for guidance and support to ensure that they keep consumers at the centre of decision making.

Aged care providers must observe local public health orders, and balance the need to protect residents, staff and others from the risk of transmission of COVID-19 with the imperative to support their consumers' wellbeing. This requires a risk-based approach by the provider that is informed by their obligations to all residents in the facility, as well as the needs, values and preferences of individual consumers.

Aged care staff should know what matters most to each of their consumers, and engage with them and their representatives in an ongoing way to customise the care arrangements relating to every older person.

If there are concerns about the care of residents, or the actions of specific services associated with visitor restrictions or any other matter, complaints can be made to the Commission by calling 1800 951 822.

The Commission will continue to innovate and adjust its regulatory efforts to ensure safe and quality care for older Australians at this time.

J. M. Anderson

Janet Anderson PSM
Commissioner

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