



Advice to sector

Regulatory response to NSW aged care services in lockdown areas

3 August 2021

The Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (the Commission) continues to monitor levels of community transmission of COVID-19 in each state and territory. The Commission adjusts its regulatory activities to changing local circumstances to ensure that aged care providers are being held to account for providing safe, quality care to older Australians.

Overview

In the current context of the elevated number of COVID-19 positive cases in NSW and the lockdown arrangements introduced by the NSW Government, the Commission has temporarily paused its full program of site-based re-accreditation audits in the Greater Sydney metropolitan area (lockdown area). This pause in our programmed work is informed by the latest expert advice regarding COVID-19 preventative measures and is aimed at minimising infection risks to aged care consumers and staff of aged care services.

However, at the same time, the Commission has stepped up its targeted activities (including telephone assessment contacts) to ensure that providers in the lockdown area in particular are maintaining their focus on the quality and safety of their care and services.

In addition, the Commission continues to undertake site visits to residential aged care services in the lockdown area where there is an assessment of heightened risk to the safety, health or wellbeing of consumers. In determining a regulatory response to an individual service, the Commission considers both:

- the risk of harm to the safety, health, wellbeing and quality of life of consumers including through the delivery of care;
- trust in the provider to mitigate the risk and impacts of harm based on provider capability and compliance history.

The NSW Department of Health has provided assurance that Commission staff can enter and remain on the premises of a residential aged care service in NSW to deliver our functions. The Commission has implemented additional risk screening processes for our field staff and prior to entry to an aged care service to protect consumers, aged care workers and our own staff.

Where the Commission decides to visit a residential service in the lockdown area, it provides short notice to the provider of this visit and consults with the relevant Public Health Unit to ensure full adherence to infection control requirements and conditions in relevant NSW government public health orders.

With respect to complaints about aged care services, the Commission's ability to receive and respond to complaints is unaffected by the pandemic. This important work continues as a core function of the Commission.

Additional information

Targeted regulatory activities with NSW residential services:

Since the current wave of community transmission commenced in NSW in late June 2021, the Commission has conducted almost 500 telephone-based assessment contacts with NSW residential aged care services to consider their outbreak management preparedness. These contacts have resulted in further follow up with services where the Commission has identified shortcomings in infection control practices.

Targeted regulatory activities with NSW home services:

The Commission is conducting targeted assessment contacts with all home service providers operating in NSW. These contacts are being conducted via telephone to understand home service provider preparedness for outbreak management. To date, 237 assessment contacts with home services have been undertaken across the state.

Aged care services outside the lockdown area:

For NSW aged care services outside the Greater Sydney area, the Commission continues to undertake site re-accreditation audits (for residential services), quality audits (for home services) and all other onsite regulatory activities with our available non-Sydney based quality assessors.

For aged care services in other states and territories, the Commission continues to undertake its full range of regulatory activities, subject to changing restrictions.

Mitigating impact of any delay in a re-accreditation site audit:

The Commission is continuing to work with the Australian Government Department of Health to support the continuity of Commonwealth residential care subsidies for services whose accreditation is due to expire but which have not yet undergone a re-accreditation site audit because of heightened COVID-19 risks in their geographical area.

Commission involvement with services experiencing an outbreak:

The Commission's monitoring of quality and safety in those residential aged care services experiencing a COVID-19 outbreak is continuing through its active involvement in outbreak management discussions with each affected service, alongside representatives of Australian and NSW government health departments.

Risk assessment for site visits in a COVID-19 safe Australia

As the Commission continues to undertake risk-based regulatory activities in the context of a COVID-safe Australia, we remain committed to ensuring that all aged care providers are concentrating on minimising infection risks to aged care consumers and residential staff.

As a risk mitigation strategy, the Commission's quality assessors conduct a thorough risk assessment prior to and on entry to a service. This risk assessment process has been designed to be used for both unannounced visits and visits where short notice is given.

When assessing risk, the Commission considers a range of factors including any symptomatic consumers or staff at the service, current cases or suspected cases of COVID-19, infection control procedures and vaccination information. Where the visit is unannounced, the Commission staff will complete the risk assessment with the approved provider immediately on entry.

With respect to its field staff, the Commission applies the following risk measures:

- provision and mandatory use of personal protective equipment (PPE) including regular training in the correct use of PPE
- mandatory application of infection control practices including screening for temperature checks and requisite use of sanitisers and wipes

- modifications to total time spent on site including maximising social distancing and increased use of electronic records to minimise the physical transfer of records
- conducting daily self-risk assessment checks prior to attending any service
- allocation of field staff to conduct visits within their own local government area (where mandated or recommended by health officials).

Our approach ensures that Commission staff pose no additional risk to consumers (or staff) of the service visited, and are not placed at avoidable risk themselves. The Commission will continue to conduct these risk assessments and risk control measures prior to and on entry to a service for the foreseeable future.

COVID-19 Vaccination

In light of the decision by National Cabinet to require COVID-19 vaccination for people working in residential aged care from mid-September 2021, the Commission is currently consulting with its staff about the intention to introduce a requirement that any Commission staff entering an aged care service must have received a COVID-19 vaccination.

Further information

Further details regarding our risk-based proportionate response to COVID-19 can be found on our [website](#).



Phone

1800 951 822



Web

agedcarequality.gov.au



Write

Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission
GPO Box 9819, In Your Capital City