



Message from the Commissioner – COVID-19

I am writing to provide an update on the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission's ongoing actions to ensure that aged care providers are supported in providing safe, quality care during the current Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

With the COVID-19 situation changing rapidly, we are continuing to review and update our response in line with the latest Government advice.

Updated regulatory response

The Commission's proportionate, risk based regulatory response to the COVID-19 outbreak is published on our **website**.

Our key focus at this time is to support providers in keeping aged care consumers safe through your efforts to prevent and control a COVID-19 outbreak in your service. The Commission is committed to supporting you in these efforts.

Based on the latest advice regarding COVID-19 preventive measures, we have adjusted our routine regulatory activities so as to minimise infection risks to aged care consumers, staff and our own employees. This means adjusting our approach to fulfilling our regulatory responsibilities and limiting site visits to those that are absolutely necessary on the basis of the Commission's assessment of risk.

Key elements of our updated regulatory response are outlined below.

- Where a site visit is necessary, based on assessed level of risk to the safety, health or wellbeing of consumers, we will notify the provider in advance and ensure that our practices are tailored and compliant with infection control requirements.
- We will undertake assessment contacts with services by telephone to monitor and support the quality of care and services to consumers. The focus of these assessment contacts is to support your infection control program and outbreak preparedness in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This will include advice on tools and resources available to providers to assist you in assessing your preparedness for COVID-19.
- If you have an upcoming reaccreditation audit, the Commission is making arrangements to ensure continuity of accreditation during this period. We will contact you to discuss your individual situation.

- We have developed an online self-assessment tool to support you to evaluate your infection control program. The tool will assist you to review the systems you have in place to manage the impact of infectious disease outbreaks and to act to identify, minimise and manage risks to the safety, health and wellbeing of your consumers. I will separately write to all aged care providers to give further details of this tool in the coming days.
- We are continuing to work closely with the Department of Health and with the sector to develop further practical tools to assist you as new information becomes available. For example, the Commission is currently developing a suite of posters in partnership with the sector peak bodies that services can customise and use at individual premises to inform visitors and staff of key operational changes.

Managing complaints

The Commission will continue to conduct our important function of managing complaints about aged care services. Our complaints line (1800 951 822) will continue to receive complaints and concerns about aged care services. Our complaints officers will address concerns in a proportionate and flexible manner to address risk to consumers while being mindful of the pressures on providers. We will continue to act quickly when dealing with complaints indicating that one or more consumers may be at risk of harm. For other complaints, we may decide to handle some through a telephone call rather than requesting a written response, and/or give providers more time to respond. We encourage providers to discuss their situation with the Complaints Officer if you are facing challenging circumstances.

Education program update

We have postponed our face to face 'Assessing against the Standards' workshops until the end of May 2020, when we will review the situation. In the meantime, we are considering options for providing this information and education via online alternatives where this is possible.

We will notify all participants and arrange a full refund by contacting the person on the event registration form. Please bear with us as we work through these event applications and refunds.

The **Aged Care Learning Solution - Alis** – is available and we encourage you to activate an Alis learner account and to undertake the modules on the Quality Standards, in particular, Standard 8 – Organisational Governance, which highlights anti-microbial stewardship under requirement 8(3)(e), and Standard 3 – Personal Care and Clinical Care, which requires providers to take action to minimise infection-related risks (3(3)(g)).

In addition, Altura Learning has put together a series of short videos on COVID-19 which it has made available to the sector free of charge. These videos can be accessed at <https://www.alturalearning.com/>

Access to information and guidance

Our focus continues to be on making sure that providers can access the latest information and tools to protect and enhance the safety and well-being of consumers.

We are working closely with relevant authorities to source and/or produce fit-for-purpose information, resources and advice, which can be found in a regularly updated section of the **Commission website**.

The Chief Medical Officer of the Commonwealth Department of Health, Professor Brendan Murphy, is also communicating with the aged care sector as the situation changes.

The Australian Government has recently released guidance developed by the Communicable Diseases Network of Australia which provides best practice information for the prevention and management of COVID-19 outbreaks in Residential Aged Care. *CDNA National Guidelines for the Prevention, Control and Public Health Management of COVID-19 Outbreaks in Residential Care Facilities in Australia*. You are urged to consult these guidelines for essential information. The guidance can be found at: <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidelines-for-outbreaks-in-residential-care-facilities>

On 14 March 2020, the Government launched its national media campaign titled - **Help stop the spread and stay healthy**. The campaign provides a variety of resources for services to consider as part of your own information sharing with consumers, their families and staff.

For more information on COVID-19, read the latest news from the Department of Health at www.health.gov.au/news.

Managing concerns in your service

We will continue to provide guidance and updated information to the sector to assist providers in ensuring that you are well-prepared, with all necessary arrangements in place.

If you have concerns about an individual consumer displaying flu-like symptoms, you should contact their GP.

If you have three or more consumers with influenza-like symptoms, or one confirmed case of COVID19, you should contact your state or territory public health unit.

Contact details for each state and territory are available here:
<http://www.health.gov.au/state-territory-contacts>. If you contact the central number provided, the state health department will direct you to your local public health unit.

For general information and advice, the National Coronavirus (COVID-19) Health Information Line is available on 1800 020 080. It operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Janet Anderson PSM
Commissioner

17 March 2020

Yours sincerely

(Name)

(Position Title)

(Date)