



COVID-19 – A message to approved providers of residential aged care services from the Commissioner

COVID-19 is radically reshaping our daily experiences in ways that we could scarcely have imagined even a week or two ago. At this time, all of us who work in aged care are highly conscious of our responsibilities in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of older people receiving aged care and services.

Protecting vulnerable communities

International evidence tells us older people, and particularly those with chronic illness, are most likely to be seriously affected if they contract COVID-19, and for some, this might lead to premature death.

As you would be aware, to help protect vulnerable communities, the Commonwealth Government has adopted recommendations of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) - the key national decision-making committee for health emergencies - regarding restrictions on visits to residential aged care services. The Commonwealth Department of Health has subsequently issued [guidance on the Department of Health website](#) to help you implement the new provisions.

Our expectations of aged care services

It is our expectation that all services are taking actions to apply these restrictions on visits to residential aged care services. Implementing these new provisions with compassion and care is of vital importance to consumers, their families and the community.

Now more than ever, you should be drawing heavily on the Aged Care Quality Standards for guidance and support to ensure that you keep your consumers at the centre of your decision-making, ensuring that their needs, values and preferences inform and shape the actions you take. Treating those in your care with dignity and respect is one of your core responsibilities that should be reflected in everything you do.

Also important are providers' efforts to strengthen your own communications with consumers and family members, and to ensure that there are adequate communication options available for connecting consumers with family members. Feedback we are receiving from consumers and their families underscores how important this is in minimising psychological and emotional distress, and in engaging their understanding, support and goodwill. Finding innovative ways for consumers to stay connected to their families while remaining safe must be a priority for your organisation.

It is also expected that providers will be proactive in identifying and minimising other risks to some consumers that may arise from the visitor restrictions (for example, where a family member often assists at a meal time).



How the Commission is responding

During this unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission is closely monitoring and supporting providers in your efforts to keep consumers safe.

The Commission is continuing to monitor and make regular contact with aged care services and to update our website with information, resources and links. We value your feedback and suggestions on what more we can do to assist you in your efforts to keep consumers safe.

For all of us, putting consumers at the centre of our decision making, treating them with dignity and respect, and exercising careful judgement in determining how we navigate through these challenging times is paramount.

We want all aged care providers to be successful in your vital work, and we stand ready to support your efforts.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "J. M. Anderson".

Janet Anderson PSM
Commissioner
23 March 2020

