



Visitor access

Supporting safe, quality care for older people in residential care

December 2021

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, residential aged care services have been required to put in place measures for access by visitors to reduce the risk of transmission. This fact sheet provides information for residential aged care providers on supporting visitations to residential aged care consumers while COVID-19 remains an ongoing risk.

AHPPC statement on visitation in residential aged care facilities

On 1 October 2021, the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) outlined the principles to remove restrictions on visitation to residential aged care facilities.

The principles, endorsed by National Cabinet, include:

- Restrictions to access should be limited to when a residential aged care facility is experiencing an outbreak, in line with best practice outbreak management, or when otherwise determined at a local level.

- Providers of residential aged care services should follow this advice and ensure that access by visitors is undertaken using appropriate COVID safe precautions such as location check-in, social distancing, and the appropriate use of Personal Protective Equipment.

Read the [AHPPC advice on visitation](#).

Public health directives

All states and territories have put into effect legislation relating to visitors to aged care services, and movement within the community generally.

The provisions can change, and aged care providers are expected to keep up to date to ensure compliance with the legal requirements applying in the jurisdiction/s in which their service/s operate.

Managing conditions for visitors

While there has been some easing of COVID-19 restrictions within the general community, many residential aged care providers continue to have in place measures to manage access by visitors to their residential services.

In implementing any such measures, aged care providers are expected to continue to exercise care and compassion, keeping consumers at the centre of decision-making.

Providers must also continue to comply with their aged care responsibilities under the *Aged Care Act 1997* and related principles, including the Aged Care Quality Standards (Quality Standards) and the Charter of Aged Care Rights.

Providers are expected to balance their responsibilities to reduce the risk of COVID-19 entering the site with their responsibilities for meeting the physical, social and emotional needs of consumers by tailoring care and services as far as possible to their individual circumstances.

This is not easy or straightforward. Achieving a good balance in the rapidly changing circumstances of the pandemic continues to require an understanding of the internal and external operating environment, knowing individual consumers and their needs, continually assessing risk, and acting accordingly.

Where providers implement or change arrangements at a residential aged care service which impact visitor access, the Commission expects providers to clearly communicate with consumers, representatives and advocates on the specific reasons and nature of the arrangements.

Concerns regarding access to visitors

Where concerns are raised with the Commission about the arrangements in place at a residential aged care service to manage visitor access, the Commission will consider the specific circumstances to determine compliance with relevant approved provider responsibilities, including that care and services are being provided in accordance with relevant consumer rights and the Quality Standards.

Relevant considerations may include:

- the nature of the measures in place
- the provider's rationale for the measures
- the circumstances of an individual consumer, and
- any actual or potential impacts on the health or wellbeing of one or more consumers.

Where the Commission develops concerns that provider responsibilities are not being met, our response will be proportionate and risk-based in accordance with the [Compliance and Enforcement Policy](#).

For example, in undertaking a complaints resolution process, the Commission may notify a provider through a Notice of Intention to Give Directions of the Commission's concerns relating to issues associated with the management of visitor access and provide them with an opportunity to respond to those concerns.

If a provider does not respond or does not satisfy the Commission that it is compliant with its responsibilities, the Commission may then issue the provider with directions or consider other enforceable regulatory actions.



Further information

- Australian Health Protection Principal Committee, [Statement on visitation in residential aged care facilities](#)
- Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission, [Compliance and Enforcement Policy](#)
- Department of Health, [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) – National aged care guidance – aged care visitation guidelines](#)
- COTA Australia, [Industry Code for Visiting Residential Aged Care Homes during COVID-19](#)

The Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission acknowledges the traditional owners of country throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to elders both past and present.



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