



What is the SIRS?

Serious Incident Response Scheme

A fact sheet for aged care providers

The Serious Incident Response Scheme (SIRS) is a new initiative to help prevent and reduce incidents of abuse and neglect in residential aged care services subsidised by the Australian Government.

The scheme requires aged care providers to identify, record, manage, resolve and report all serious incidents that occur, or are alleged or suspected to have occurred.

Aged care providers also need to have in place an effective incident management system to manage all incidents, respond to incidents, and take steps to minimise the risk of preventable incidents reoccurring. The incident management system covers a broader range of non-reportable incidents and includes incidents that involve staff or visitors.

Why is the SIRS important?

The SIRS requires every residential aged care service to adopt a systematic approach to minimising the risk of, and responding to, serious incidents involving residents. The core of this systematic approach is a set of protocols, processes and standard operating procedures – described as an incident

management system – which providers train their staff to use. An incident management system is vital in supporting residential aged care services to effectively manage risks to their consumers.

The SIRS also introduces explicit obligations for providers to report a broader range of serious incidents to the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (Commission) than is currently required under compulsory reporting obligations. This includes reports of all incidents that are alleged or suspected to have occurred, or witnessed, between consumers of an aged care service, including where the consumer who commits the incident has a cognitive or mental impairment (such as dementia).

Under this scheme, residential aged care providers will be required to take all reasonable steps to reduce the risk of serious incidents involving residents, and if a serious incident does occur, to manage it effectively and, where required, report it to the Commission. Providers will also be expected to put in place measures to minimise the risk of a preventable incident recurring.

When will the SIRS commence?

From 1 April 2021, providers of residential aged care must report all 'Priority 1' incidents within 24 hours. 'Priority 1' incidents include those that cause or could reasonably have caused physical or psychological injury or illness requiring some form of medical or psychological treatment.

Instances of unexplained absence from care and any unexpected death of a consumer are always to be regarded as 'Priority 1' reportable incidents.

From 1 October 2021, all 'Priority 2' incidents – reportable incidents that do not meet the criteria for 'Priority 1' – must also be reported within 30 days.

How is the SIRS different from the current compulsory reporting requirements?

As part of the SIRS, residential aged care providers will be required to report and manage all serious incidents which impact on the safety and wellbeing of consumers, and put in place measures to reduce the likelihood of a preventable incident happening again.

The range of serious incidents that are reportable under the SIRS is broader than those reported under current compulsory reporting requirements (refer to table in section below).

Importantly, providers will have to report incidents of abuse and aggression between consumers, including where the resident who commits the incident has a cognitive or mental impairment.

How do I report an incident under the SIRS?

From 1 April, incidents will be reported using a new tile on the My Aged Care Provider Portal, managed by the Department of Health. Information on accessing and using the Provider Portal can be found on the Department of Health website.

What are the benefits of the SIRS?

All Australians have a right to live free from abuse or neglect. The SIRS will strengthen aged care systems to reduce the risk of abuse and neglect. It will also help to build providers' capability to respond to serious incidents promptly and decisively, and to ensure that aged care consumers have the support they need.

The SIRS will help aged care service providers to:

- reduce the risk of abuse and neglect in aged care
- respond to and manage serious incidents that occur in residential aged care
- support care recipients affected by a serious incident.

How does the SIRS relate to other requirements an aged care provider must meet?

The SIRS will sit alongside, and complement, other requirements that aged care providers must meet.

All providers must comply with the [Aged Care Quality Standards](#) which detail the standards of care a consumer can expect as an aged care consumer. For example:

Standard 8 – Organisational Governance

Requires approved providers to have in place effective risk management systems and practices that enable them (among other things) to manage high-impact risks associated with the care of consumers, and to identify and respond to abuse and neglect of consumers.

Standard 6 – Feedback and Complaints

Requires approved providers to demonstrate (among other things) that an [open disclosure](#) process is used when things go wrong in providing care for consumers.

A provider is also legally required to help consumers understand their rights under the [Charter of Aged Care Rights](#).

Taken together, these requirements reinforce the importance of aged care providers having an effective incident management system in place.

What is a reportable incident under the SIRS?

Reportable incidents include those listed below.

Serious incidents include those where consumers experience:	Examples
Unreasonable use of force	hitting, pushing, shoving or rough handling.
Unlawful sexual contact or inappropriate sexual conduct	sexual threats or stalking, or sexual activities without consent.
Neglect	withholding personal care, untreated wounds, or insufficient assistance during meals.
Psychological or emotional abuse	yelling, name calling, ignoring a consumer, threatening gestures or refusing a consumer access to care or services as a means of punishment.
Unexpected death	in the event of a fall, untreated pressure injury, or when the actions of a consumer result in the death of another consumer.
Stealing or financial coercion by a staff member	if a staff member coerces a consumer to change their will to their advantage, or steals valuables from the resident.
Inappropriate use of restrictive practices	where restrictive practices are used other than in the circumstances set out in Part 4A of the Quality of Care Principles, such as without prior consent or without notifying the consumer's restrictive practices substitute decision-maker as soon as practicable, where restrictive practices are used in a non-emergency situation, or when a provider issues a drug to a consumer to influence their behaviour as a form of chemical restraint.
Unexplained absence from care	this occurs when the consumer is absent from the service, it is unexplained and has been reported to the police.

Under the SIRS, an allegation, suspicion or witness account of any of the above serious incidents must be reported to the Commission.



What is an incident management system?

An incident management system is a set of processes and procedures used to prevent, manage and respond to incidents. This system should support an aged care provider and their staff to take appropriate action when there is an alleged, suspected or witnessed incident.

Appropriate action includes:

- action to remove consumer/s from harm and to reduce or address the impact on any consumer/s
- identification and immediate internal reporting of the allegation, suspicion or witnessed incident
- documenting the incident
- further investigation if warranted
- reporting to external authorities within statutory timeframes, including the police and the Commission.

What is the role of the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission?

The Commission will be responsible for administering the SIRS and will receive serious incident reports from aged care providers. The Commission will have the power to take regulatory action where appropriate to address non-compliance with provider responsibilities and will have new powers to issue compliance notices for suspected non-compliance with SIRS obligations.

The Commission has published the *Serious Incident Response Scheme – Guidelines for residential aged care providers* which is available for download at agedcarequality.gov.au/sirs

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