



Significant growth in regulatory activities relating to aged care in the context of COVID-19

**Statement from Ms Janet Anderson PSM
1 September 2020**

“Site visits to aged care services by the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission have increased significantly this year.

The Commission, as the national regulator, has conducted more than 1,100 site visits to aged care services since January, including 410 visits to check infection control practices.

The Commission modified its regulatory program in March 2020 to focus additional effort where it is needed most to ensure that providers are doing everything possible to keep aged care consumers safe.

Throughout the pandemic, the Commission has continued to expand its monitoring and compliance activities, including undertaking telephone assessment contacts and self-assessment surveys with all aged care residential and home services, and conducting site visits to monitor and assess the quality of care at aged care services.

Between 16 March and 14 August 2020, a total of 487 unannounced and short-notice visits were undertaken to aged care services across all states. Unannounced visits were changed to short-notice visits for 11 weeks from 16 March, and recommenced in June 2020.

The Commission is working with state and territory governments and their local health authorities across the nation to monitor and test preparedness of aged care residential services. The approach is drawing on lessons learned from outbreaks in NSW and Victoria to ensure that all services nationally have well-tested plans, adequate training and infection control practices to minimise infection risks and to respond immediately, decisively and effectively if a positive case is identified in their service.

Unannounced spot checks conducted by the Commission initially in Victoria and NSW are being extended to all jurisdictions to observe infection control practices, and ensure that staff, management and visitors are adhering to safe personal protective equipment (PPE) protocols, and safe infection control arrangements.

The spot checks include a review against best practice based on the Communicable Diseases Network Australia guidelines for COVID-19 Outbreaks in Aged Care Facilities.

During visits, Commission regulatory officials provide real time feedback identifying areas for improvement at the service. After visits, the Commission provides a written summary of this feedback for further consideration and action by the service. Examples

of issues found to date include instances of incorrect use and disposal of PPE, inadequate infection control signage and poor hand hygiene practices.

In addition to the above, since the beginning of the pandemic, the Commission has conducted a telephone assessment of every aged care approved provider (of both residential care and home services) as part of a national activity to monitor providers' preparation for a potential COVID-19 outbreak and their arrangements for managing visitor restrictions.

We have also surveyed all aged care residential and home care services, requesting them to self-assess and submit advice to the Commission on their preparedness for COVID-19 based on guidance documents published by the CDNA and the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee.

As part of a pilot initiative currently being evaluated, the Commission has also made over 5,000 telephone calls to individual home care consumers to ascertain their views of the quality and safety of the aged care services they are receiving. Where concerning issues have been raised, these have been followed up.

Through all of its activities, where the Commission identifies concerns in relation to a particular provider, further regulatory action is taken to ensure that the provider is meeting its obligations under the Aged Care Quality Standards.

This includes action in relation to residential services with a positive COVID-19 case where there has been an immediate and severe risk to care recipients due to the management of the outbreak. The Commission has issued 20 Notices of Requirement to Agree to Certain Actions (called a Notice to Agree) to providers in Victoria and NSW since the beginning of the pandemic.

A Notice to Agree sets out actions a provider is required to complete within strict timeframes. Should a provider fail to agree, their approval to provide Australian Government subsidised aged care may be revoked.

The Commission is committed to increasing transparency of information about the outcomes of its regulatory activities and providers' performance, and now publishes a register of all non-compliance decisions made by the Commission.

Details of compliance actions including the issuing of non-compliance notices, notices to agree and sanctions are available on the My Aged Care website.

The Commission continues to use the full range of its regulatory activities to ensure the safety and wellbeing of aged care consumers.

If anyone has a concern about an aged care service, complaints can be made via the Commission's website www.agedcarequality.gov.au or by calling 1800 951 822."

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