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MEDIA RELEASE

Staying alert and on guard – an imperative for aged care services during the global pandemic

Commissioner Janet Anderson PSM has clearly communicated to aged care providers her expectation that they will continue to focus on minimising the risks and impact of a potential COVID-19 outbreak in their aged care service.

The Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission has released a new comprehensive guide, *Outbreak management planning in aged care*, for use by residential aged care providers in supporting their workers, care recipients and family members, and visitors to prevent, prepare for and manage an outbreak of COVID-19.

Commissioner Anderson said the aged care sector cannot afford to be complacent and must do everything possible to prepare for any future COVID-19 outbreaks, even as Australians transition to a "COVID-normal" way of living, with no or minimal detectable levels of community transmission or positive cases in local communities.

Ms Anderson said: "As a sector, we have learned much from this pandemic to date and it is important that we continue to embed these learnings into our practice to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of older people receiving care, their families, staff and the broader community.

The experience of providers through the challenging months of 2020 highlights how critical effective planning and preparation is – it literally makes the difference between life and death, between confidence and panic."

The document released on 27 November provides comprehensive practical guidance for residential aged care services by bringing together resources published not only by the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission, but also the Commonwealth Department of Health and State and Territory Health Departments.

The guide provides advice for aged care operators in key areas, including:

- **Infection prevention and control** - this includes infection control processes (such as hand hygiene and physical distancing), screening and testing, use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), cleaning and clinical waste management.
- **Screening, monitoring and testing** - undertaking routine screening of all people entering the service, including staff, visiting health professionals, service providers and visitors.
- **Isolating residents** - separating residents who are COVID-19 negative from residents who are COVID-19 positive as a fundamental part of a response plan.
- **Personal protective equipment (PPE)** – ensuring there is sufficient PPE on hand prior to any outbreak occurring.
- **Cleaning** - takes on greater significance during a pandemic and providers must be prepared to increase cleaning, particularly of high-touch surfaces.
- **Waste management** – critical during an outbreak with potentially contaminated waste.



- **Workforce** – considering potential workforce impacts of COVID-19; considering minimum workforce requirements and how to use furloughed staff remotely.
- **Communications** – an increased need for communicating with people receiving care at the service and their families during times of uncertainty.
- **Liaising with external agencies** – knowing the reporting requirements and involving other service providers and government agencies in your outbreak management planning before the need to respond arises.
- **Visitor access and restrictions** – limiting visitors can help reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 where there is an identified risk or an outbreak, but should not be a part of routine operations where risks are very low. Family members providing personal care and assistance to a loved one in residential care should be given special consideration.

Aged care providers in Australia are regulated by the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission. The Commission's statutory role is to hold providers to account for the quality and safety of the care they provide to older Australians and to ensure that the care delivered complies with the Aged Care Quality Standards and Principles under the Aged Care Act.

The Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission will publish further resources over coming months to support aged care providers to operate safely in a COVID-normal world as they focus on ensuring and enhancing the wellbeing and quality of life of the older Australians in their care.

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.

Please visit the [Commission's website](#) for the full report.

Media enquiries: media@agedcarequality.gov.au