



Dear approved provider of residential services

Operating in a COVID-normal environment over the holiday period

Holidays provide important additional opportunities for older people, including aged care residents, to enjoy spending time with friends and family and taking part in activities in the community. The pandemic does not alter this fact.

It is up to providers to manage and mitigate COVID-19 risks to aged care residents, including the risks that isolation poses to their physical, social and emotional wellbeing. Face-to-face get togethers between residents, family members and friends should be facilitated where they can be undertaken safely and are permitted under public health orders.

In determining arrangements for visitors entering the service, and for residents travelling from and returning to the service, providers should start with a risk assessment. This will inform decisions about measures to be implemented that will maximise the opportunity for residents to take part in social activities as safely as possible.

Safe visitor access includes ensuring that screening of visitors is undertaken in accordance with public health orders, and that robust infection prevention and control measures are in place at all times, including PPE use, physical distancing, hand hygiene and surface cleaning practices. Use of covered outdoor areas for get togethers offers the additional benefit of increased ventilation.

If the Commission receives complaints about visitor access or resident egress we will ask the provider to explain any restrictions beyond the public health orders, and request details of the risk assessment undertaken and how the needs and choices of individual residents are being supported.

Being prepared and ready for an outbreak

Australia has lived with COVID-19 for nearly two years and the pandemic is ongoing. There is no justification for an aged care provider to be unprepared for an outbreak at this time. Every aged care service across Australia must have a comprehensive, up to date, well-rehearsed outbreak management plan, and must be ready to activate it immediately.

As providers of aged care services, you are responsible for safeguarding the health and wellbeing of older Australians in your care, and it is your obligation to ensure that you have the necessary plans in place and are fully ready to implement them without delay in the event of an outbreak. Notification of the relevant health authorities must be part of your immediate response.

Staff turnover and casual staffing arrangements should be factored into your preparations, with particular attention paid to ensuring that all staff – however new – have the necessary knowledge and skills to fulfil their responsibilities without hesitation in an outbreak.



The Commission is undertaking additional regulatory activities to monitor services' compliance with infection control arrangements. A slow or ineffective response to an outbreak by a provider places both residents and staff at increased risk of harm, and is likely to result in regulatory action by the Commission.

The Commission has developed a new resource, '*What we learned from COVID-19 outbreaks in 2021*', that summarises the lessons learned from more than 340 COVID-19 outbreaks at residential aged care services in 2021. It is strongly recommended that you use this resource to review your state of readiness:

<https://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/resources/what-we-learned-covid-19-outbreaks-2021-fact-sheet>

As we reach the end of another difficult year and move into a new year facing these ongoing challenges, I urge you to ensure that your service(s) have effective systems in place to manage risks appropriately and to act promptly. This is your responsibility as an aged care provider.

Please draw on the published resources available to help you prepare in every way possible for any changes in circumstances at your service(s) which could impact the safety, health and wellbeing of the residents in your care:

<https://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/providers/covid-19-provider-resources>

In closing, I want to thank you for the time and effort that you and your staff dedicate to providing care and support for older Australians, and wish you all the very best for the festive season.

Yours sincerely

Janet Anderson PSM
Commissioner

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