



Regulatory Response to COVID-19 in Aged Care

Brisbane North Annual Aged Care Forum

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agedcarequality.gov.au

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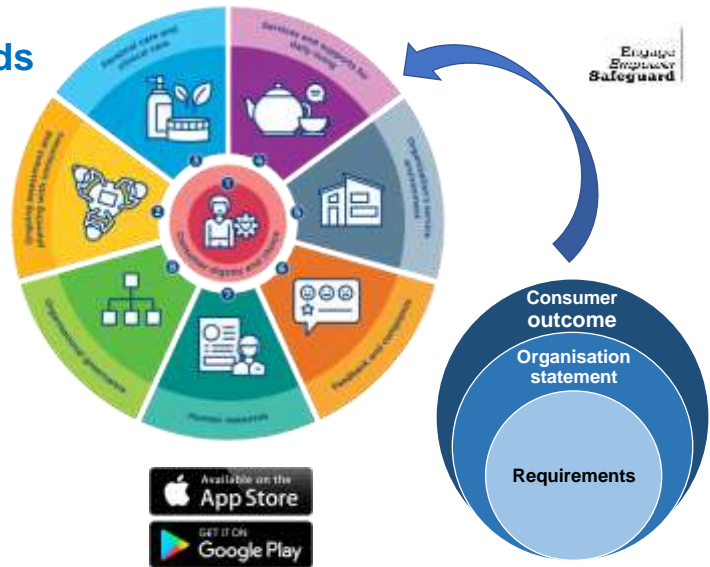
Managing risk and monitoring the sector

- During the pandemic, the community is looking for reassurance that older people receiving aged care will be well looked after and kept safe.
- The Commission is using its broad range of regulatory functions to help manage risks and monitor the performance of the aged care sector against the Quality Standards. This includes:
 - engaging with consumers
 - supporting providers through advice, guidance and education
 - resolving complaints about providers
 - undertaking monitoring and assessment activities, including risk-based site visits and remote contacts
 - pursuing compliance enforcement activities where necessary.

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Aged Care Quality Standards

1. Consumer dignity and choice
2. Ongoing assessment and planning with consumers
3. Personal care and clinical care
4. Services and supports for daily living
5. Organisation's service environment
6. Feedback and complaints
7. Human resources
8. Organisational governance



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Aims of Commission's approach

- The Commission's approach provides for escalation within a framework of efficient use of regulatory resources while minimising regulatory burden
- Key aims of the Commission's regulatory strategy include that:
 - Providers have sufficient information to allow them to comply with their quality, safety and prudential responsibilities (including striving for continuous improvement);
 - Providers are motivated to voluntarily and proactively comply with their responsibilities;
 - The risk of provider non-compliance with these responsibilities is monitored;
 - Appropriate and proportionate action is taken where non-compliance is identified;
 - Consumers and their representatives have sufficient information about the performance of aged care services to support comparisons, choices and actions



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Proportionate risk-based regulatory response to COVID-19

We will always act in the best interests of people who receive aged care services by:

- focusing our additional effort where it is needed most to ensure that aged care consumers are safe, by concentrating on services where we identify elevated risk to safe, quality care; and
- being flexible in considering adjustments to our routine regulatory activities and program so as to avoid putting untimely demands on providers; and
- supporting providers and fulfilling our duty of care to Commission staff.



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Responding to the pandemic as the national regulator

- COVID-19 Commission governance and structures
- Joint Commonwealth and state/territory aged care preparedness
- Communication and engagement - training and resources
- Regulatory activities - site visits, infection control monitoring program, other monitoring activities, managing non-compliance, complaints about services
- Visitor Access campaign
- Outbreak management planning guidance project
- Lessons learned from COVID-19 outbreaks in RACFs

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COVID-19 Related Complaint issues

1 March 2020 – 30 September 2021
(3 months)

3,024 complaints

Most frequent issues:

- Visitor restrictions
- Concerns about preparedness & prevention
- Impact on the quality of care
- Positive/possible COVID 19 test results
- Concerns about Flu Vaccinations



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Infection Prevention and Control

- All residential aged care services are now required to have a dedicated onsite, clinical Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) lead.
- The IPC lead requirement is intended to ensure each residential aged care facility has ongoing access to onsite IPC expertise to safeguard the health of all residents and staff.
- The Commission's Aged Care Quality Standards Guidance and Resources for Providers reflects IPC lead requirements, including the need for specific infection control training.
- The Commission considers how providers have met their IPC responsibilities in the context of monitoring and assessing performance against the Aged Care Quality Standards.



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Vaccinations at Services

- On 28 June 2021, National Cabinet agreed that COVID-19 vaccination would become a mandatory condition of working in an aged care facility.
- As a further protection for aged care consumers and staff, the Commission introduced the same requirement for any quality assessors visiting an aged care service.
- The Commission has engaged with identified high risk providers through targeted Infection Control Spot Checks, performance assessments and/or as part of a full quality or review audit.
- The Commission will continue to review practices for risk assessment and entry procedures to align with changes to state and territory government health directions.



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Supporting safe, quality care for aged care consumers during visitor restrictions – published by the Commission in April 2020 to reinforce the Quality Standards



Industry-led **Aged Care Visitor Access Code** - supports a nationally consistent approach by providers, and **empowers consumers and family members** to have an informed discussion with providers about access arrangements

Fact sheet issued by Commission – to describe how we will have regard to the Code in our regulatory and complaints management activities



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What we learned about the sector through the pandemic



- Leadership and governance
- Resourcing (Regional vs Metro)
- Consistency
- Preparedness and initial response
- Human resources
- Infection prevention and control
- Clinical care and consumer wellbeing
- Communication
- Waste management



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What outbreak sites have learned about themselves



- Visible leadership
- Role clarity
- Online training is only the start of the journey
- Understanding staff and their strengths, needs and personal circumstances is critical in planning a response
- How to think differently/creatively/innovatively, especially around consumer connection
- Rehearsals must be realistic simulations (minimum 24 hours in outbreak mode)
- Outbreaks can go for 80 days plus and then a second one can occur at the same service
- Key relationships that will be relied on, need to be in place before the outbreak; once it has started, it's too late for dating
- Communication needs to work for each receiver of the message, in both content and frequency



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Impact on consumers - Key lessons for providers



Residential aged care services – Restricting visitors

- Visitors and partners in care provide essential support
- Services must not apply “just in case” restrictions on visitors or total lockdown on residents
- Expectation that services will safely facilitate visitation
- Monitoring of physical conditioning and psychosocial wellbeing of residents is essential
- Maintaining normal routines for residents

Home care services – Safety and continuity of care

- Ongoing communication with and reassurance of individuals receiving care (for RACS as well)
- Appropriate training in use of personal protective equipment
- Reducing the footprint of where staff visit
- Ensuring staff report COVID-19 symptoms and not work while symptomatic
- Contingency planning to avoid disruption if workers unavailable



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Questions?



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Further Information



<https://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/>

<https://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/covid-19-information>



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