

# COVID-19 in Residential Aged Care

Report on Response Planning and  
Progress

March 2020 to March 2021



## Contents

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<b>Background</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Aims of Report</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Approach</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Aged Care Directions</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Rapid Response and Emergency Planning</b>	<b>6</b>
Rapid Response – COVID-19 in a Residential Aged Care Facility	6
Joint Aged Care Health Emergency Response Operations Centre	6
Scenario Test	7
Clinical Governance Framework for Rapid Response to COVID-19 Outbreaks in Residential Aged Care Facilities	8
Regular Joint Planning and Engagement Meetings	8
Outbreak Incident: Karinya Place Aged Care Home, Laidley	8
<b>Planning and Preparedness</b>	<b>9</b>
Workforce	9
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	9
Preparedness Checklist	10
COVID-19 Outbreak Management Preparing and responding	10
Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) Training	10
HHS IPC Training and Support – September to December 2020	11
Clinical Advice and Guidelines	11
<b>Testing</b>	<b>12</b>
Testing Strategies for Residential Aged Care	12
COVID-19 Testing - Booking and Triage Solution	12
<b>Assurance Processes</b>	<b>13</b>
Queensland Health-Run Residential Aged Care Facilities	13
Multi-purpose Health Services (MPHS)	13
Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission - Risk Analysis	13
Hospital and Health Service Support for Residential Aged Care Facilities	13
<b>Consultation and Communication</b>	<b>14</b>
COVID-19 Aged Care Working Group	14
Aged Care Leads Group	14
Queensland Health Residential Aged Care Best Practice Network	15
Mailing List	15
COVID-19 Web Content for Older Queenslanders	15
COVID-19 Web Content for Residential Aged Care Sector	16
Communications Guidance	16
Outbreak Incident: Fairview Pinjarra Hills, Brookfield	17
<b>Hospital Interface</b>	<b>18</b>
Ensuring Inpatient Capacity	18

Residential Aged Care Support Service (RaSS)	18
COVID-19 in Residential Aged Care – Approach to Transfer and Hospital Admissions	19
Hospital in the Home (HITH)	19
<b>Palliative Care</b>	<b>20</b>
Guidance for People in Quarantine Visiting Residents Receiving End of Life Care	20
Principles of Palliative Care for Residents of Residential Aged Care Facilities during COVID-19	20
Participation on the Palliative Care Queensland Sector Working Group	21
Outbreak Incident North Rockhampton Nursing Centre	21
<b>Continuous Improvement</b>	<b>22</b>
Learnings	22
<b>Next Steps</b>	<b>22</b>

# Background

Older people are at the highest risk of severe disease, hospitalisation and death from COVID-19. This risk increases continuously from 60-years of age and becomes much higher over 70-years<sup>1</sup>.

As seen in other jurisdictions in Australia, COVID-19 outbreaks can have profound impacts on residents and staff of aged care facilities.

While aged care services are well practiced in planning for and managing outbreaks such as influenza, COVID-19 has presented much greater challenges. Providers have been required to rapidly amend their protocols and practices, step up infection prevention and control measures and respond to a raft of legislative and policy requirements.

Since March 2020, residents have had to respond to restrictions and changes in their living environment. Relatives and friends have had to cope with restrictions on visiting loved ones.

While the Commonwealth Department of Health is responsible for aged care in Australia, the Queensland Department of Health is working to support both public and private facilities in Queensland to plan for and respond to COVID-19 in aged care.

## Aims of Report

Experiences in other jurisdictions have highlighted that some facilities may not have the resources or capability to respond effectively to COVID-19 and that governments need to provide additional support to mitigate the impact of COVID-19.

Queensland Health has therefore implemented a range of measures to support the aged care sector, working with its Commonwealth counterparts and other state Government Departments to deliver responses to the COVID-19 challenge.

This report provides an overview of the relevant work undertaken between March 2020 and March 2021.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2020/implications-covid-19-ageing-population>

# Approach

Queensland Health is committed to ensuring the health and safety of every resident living in aged care in Queensland.

It has endeavoured to ensure the aged care sector and government agencies are well prepared to respond to new cases of COVID-19 to keep people safe.

Queensland Government has approached the COVID-19 in residential aged care response in a conservative and cautious manner. This approach has helped to ensure that, as at 31 March 2021, there have been no COVID-19 deaths in Queensland's aged care facilities.

Restrictions and preventative measures such as personal protective equipment (PPE) use have helped to ensure COVID-19 has only affected three Queensland aged care facilities and that in all these cases, effective infection management helped to ensure COVID-19 did not spread to residents.

## Aged Care Directions

Throughout this pandemic, restrictions on facilities, enacted through the Chief Health Officer's Aged Care Direction, have been a primary means of public health control of COVID transmission.

The Aged Care Directions are used to impose a range of restrictions in response to risk including

- Recommending/requiring staff do not work across multiple facilities;
- The requirement for staff and visitors to use;
- Use of Personal Protective Equipment;
- Restrictions on visits in response to increasing risk;
- The requirement for staff and visitors to have an influenza vaccination; and
- Restrictions on residents leaving the facilities in response to increasing risk.

It is intended that restrictions are imposed for the shortest time possible and only while there is a public health justification. Accordingly, the type and scope of restrictions are frequently reviewed to ensure they are appropriate.

The Aged Care Direction provides that additional measures apply in Restricted Areas where it is considered there is greater risk of transmission.

As at 31 March 2021, a total of 25 Aged Care Directions have been issued in response to changes to the level of risk, community transmission and learnings from other outbreaks and experiences in other jurisdictions.

Aged care directions are available online at <https://www.health.qld.gov.au/system-governance/legislation/cho-public-health-directions-under-expanded-public-health-act-powers/aged-care>

# Rapid Response and Emergency Planning

## Rapid Response – COVID-19 in a Residential Aged Care Facility

To ensure an appropriate, rapid response can be implemented for a COVID-19 event in an aged care facility in Queensland, a joint state/Commonwealth working group with expertise in disaster planning and management, public health and aged care was established to undertake an integrated planning process.

This resulted in the delivery of the Rapid Response – COVID-19 in a Residential Aged Care Facility (RACF Rapid Response). The RACF Rapid Response forms an appendix to the Queensland Whole of Government Rapid Response Plan.

The RACF Rapid Response articulates the roles, responsibilities and processes agreed on by the working group. It will help to ensure that all parties, including the Commonwealth Government, which is the regulator and funder of aged care, can be quickly and effectively mobilised to respond to an outbreak in a Queensland RACF.

The RACF Rapid Response facilitates four core responses to a COVID-19 incident:

- Public health responses to support an RACF to control the infection
- Continuity of care (clinical) for residents including ensuring they can receive healthcare in situ where appropriate e.g. through hospital substitutive care services
- Service continuity supports to ensure the facility continues to operate and provide an appropriate level of service to residents
- Communication strategies to ensure stakeholders, including the families of residents, are kept up to date about the emerging situation and responses.

An overview of the rapid response is available online at

[https://www.health.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0030/993045/COVID-19-Rapid-Response-RACF.pdf](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0030/993045/COVID-19-Rapid-Response-RACF.pdf)

## Joint Aged Care Health Emergency Response Operations Centre

On 25 January 2020, the State Health Emergency Coordination Centre (SHECC) was activated to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Queensland has stood up or is leaning forward Health Emergency Operations Centres in Hospital and Health Services (HHS) across the state.

In line with National Cabinet requirements, Queensland has developed a model for its own Aged Care Health Emergency Response Operation Centre. These Operations Centres are designed to boost capacity to respond to outbreaks of COVID-19 in residential aged care and to integrate with existing Commonwealth and state/territory public health and aged care emergency response arrangements.

The Queensland Aged Care Health Emergency Response Operations Centre (ACHEROC) will be implemented as a cell of the State Health Emergency Coordination Centre (SHECC). This enables the ACHEROc to draw on the capabilities, systems and resources of SHECC, whilst providing dedicated aged care intelligence gathering and coordination capabilities.

The ACHEROc will provide overarching support and coordination to the Outbreak Management Teams established at each RACF in the event of an outbreak and the local Health Emergency Operations Centre (HEOC). It will bring together liaison Officers from the Queensland and Commonwealth Governments to:

- monitor the emerging situation
- provide dedicated aged care intelligence gathering and coordination
- develop shared reports that will provide the Queensland and Commonwealth governments with consistent information
- develop joint requests for assistance.

The decision to stand up the ACHEROc will be jointly agreed by the Queensland and Commonwealth Governments to respond to significant system strain e.g. multiple outbreaks across multiple regions.

## Scenario Test

On 2 December 2020, Queensland Health hosted a scenario test to ensure the ACHEROc and Rapid Response – COVID-19 in a Residential Aged Care Facility could be rapidly operationalised and were fit for purpose.

The scenario testing workshop was chaired by Bronwyn Nardi (Assistant Deputy Director-General, Prevention Division) and facilitated by Peter Readman, Queensland Fire and Emergency Services.

A total of 42 participants joined the meeting in person, via Teams or by telephone. Participants included sector representatives, aged care providers and officers from Commonwealth and State Government agencies.

The scenario involved increasing numbers of COVID-19 cases in two geographical locations – Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service (HHS) and Metro South HHS – and five Residential Aged Care Facilities' with varying levels of capability and preparedness.

# Clinical Governance Framework for Rapid Response to COVID-19 Outbreaks in Residential Aged Care Facilities

The Department of Health has, in collaboration with consumer organisations and stakeholders from across the care continuum, developed a document which outlines governance arrangements in the event of an outbreak at a Residential Aged Care Facility.

This document helps to ensure an integrated, adaptive clinical governance system and facilitates a cohesive clinical response to outbreak management, with residents and families at the centre. The focus of the document is on the roles, responsibilities, accountabilities and communications required to facilitate an integrated response.

The Clinical Governance Framework can be accessed at

[https://www.health.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/1016262/Clinical-Governance-Framework-RACF-COVID.pdf](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/1016262/Clinical-Governance-Framework-RACF-COVID.pdf)

## Regular Joint Planning and Engagement Meetings

Queensland Health officers meet at least fortnightly with Commonwealth Department of Health state representatives to discuss issues and plan next steps. Monthly meetings are held with the national office of the Commonwealth Department of Health to escalate significant issues and discuss progress on issues related to National Cabinet.

Queensland has also worked closely with the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission on a range of issues including risk analysis for residential aged care facilities in Queensland.

Both the Commonwealth Department of health and the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission are members of the COVID-19 Aged Care Working Group which meets regularly.

These meetings have helped develop relationships and jointly plan and progress issues including the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) stockpile for rapid deployment to aged care; the Rapid Response: COVID-19 in a Residential aged Care Facility plan and a range of other planning and guidance documents.

### Outbreak Incident: Karinya Place Aged Care Home, Laidley

On 3 September 2020 a staff member tested positive for COVID-19. The staff member was asymptomatic while working at the facility. A joint response between the provider, the Hospital and Health Service, General Practitioners, and the Commonwealth Department of Health was rapidly implemented.

Residents and staff who had contact with the staff member (who was wearing appropriate PPE whilst infective) were placed into quarantine and remaining residents received care in their own environment.

Three rounds of testing were undertaken. No additional positive cases were identified.

# Planning and Preparedness

## Workforce

While workforce support for private RACFs is primarily a Commonwealth responsibility, Queensland is continuing to plan support for providers and the Commonwealth Department of Health to address workforce issues.

It has identified surge workforce options to support both public and private residential aged care facilities in the event of an outbreak.

The Department of Health has developed a workforce framework which aims to

- Outline roles and responsibilities for surge workforce support (Commonwealth, Queensland and Aged Care Provider).
- Provide advice and guidance to the aged care sector about practical steps they can take to prepare for and respond to the workforce impacts of COVID-19 in Residential Aged Care Facilities.

The *COVID in Residential Aged Care – Workforce Framework* is available online at [https://www.health.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0019/1016236/COVID-in-Aged-Care-Workforce-.pdf](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/1016236/COVID-in-Aged-Care-Workforce-.pdf).

## Aged Care Workforce Retention Payment

On 20 March 2020, as part of the COVID-19 response, the Commonwealth Government announced an Aged Care Workforce Retention payment for the workers of approved residential aged care providers. The support was announced as a ‘retention bonus’ to ensure continuity of the workforce. For Queensland Health, this covered staff in both Residential Aged Care Facilities, Multi Purpose Health Services, and home care services. Payments of up to \$800, based on the number of hours worked, were made in July and September 2020 for eligible aged care workers. Almost 2,650 staff across Queensland Health were identified as being eligible, with about half being paid the full amount.

## Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

The Department of Health, via the Commonwealth Government, has secured a dedicated emergency PPE stockpile comprising more than 150,000 items. This PPE is held exclusively for an aged care response at selected locations across the state. It will be rapidly deployed in the event of an outbreak.

The Department has also developed guidelines for the use of PPE in Residential Aged Care and The RACF and Disability care sectors to provide clarity and consistency for decisions regarding PPE. This guidance is available at

[https://www.health.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0016/1003633/pandemic-response-guide-ppe-agedcare-disability-services.pdf](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/1003633/pandemic-response-guide-ppe-agedcare-disability-services.pdf)

## Preparedness Checklist

The Department of Health has developed a *Checklist for preparation for COVID-19 prevention and outbreak management*. This document complements the resources provided by the Commonwealth Government to assist aged care providers to prepare for outbreaks and is available online at

<https://clinicalexcellence.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/docs/improvement/racf-covid-19-preparation-checklist.pdf>

### COVID-19 Outbreak Management Preparing and responding

A comprehensive guide for the sector: *COVID-19 Outbreak Management Preparing and responding – Guidance for Residential Aged Care Facilities in Queensland* was developed in close consultation with key stakeholders to support the sector.

Clinical Excellence Queensland, specialists in primary care and palliative care, as well as non-government partners who provided input in their areas of expertise to ensure comprehensive Queensland-focussed advice.

Contributors including Carers Queensland, Aged and Disability Advocacy Australia, Palliative Care Queensland, Queenslanders with Disability Network, Council on the Ageing Queensland and Health Consumers Queensland helped to ensure that the guidelines considered and prioritised residents and their families.

The finished document supports Residential Aged Care Facilities to prevent and prepare for COVID-19 outbreaks tailored to the Queensland context.

The guidance document can be found at

[https://www.health.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0025/1004677/racf-covid19-outbreak-management-guidelines.pdf](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0025/1004677/racf-covid19-outbreak-management-guidelines.pdf)

## Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) Training

Queensland Health delivered online Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) training sessions for RACF infection and prevention control leads, with a recording available online. The series is designed to support the capacity and capability of Residential and Aged Care and Disability Service facilities to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. It can be found at <https://cdn-au.mailsnd.com/32404/2hVvxyRyzvjKx1MjphjfskGzZTON1PczBGFevKQUmEs/3299511.pdf>

Additional face-to-face training has been offered to the aged care sector by Queensland Health through a multi-modal approach.

Queensland Government in partnership with TAFE Queensland is also delivering Infection Prevention and Control training for personal care and other workers in residential aged care

and disability care via the Unit of Competence: 'Comply with infection prevention and control policies and procedures'. This training is offered free of charge to aged care and disability workers across the state, providing a pathway to gain vital IPC knowledge or refresh and consolidate existing skills. Further information about the course can be found at [https://www.health.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0019/1016353/infection-control-PD-PR.pdf](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/1016353/infection-control-PD-PR.pdf)

## HHS IPC Training and Support – September to December 2020

All 15 Hospital and Health Services (HHS) (excluding Children's Health Queensland) provided Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) support to the public Residential Aged Care Facilities (RACFs) within their catchment between September and December 2020.

A total of 27 public facilities were supported.

During this period, a total of 90 training sessions were provided for staff of public RACFs, with 248 staff participating.

HHS also provided 54 training sessions to 857 staff of private RACFs.

## Clinical Advice and Guidelines

Clinical Excellence Queensland within the Department of Health provides the latest available information to assist clinicians to respond to the evolving COVID-19 situation.

It has produced a suite of collaborative pathways for General Practitioners and Registered nurses which helps to support Management of suspected or confirmed COVID-19 in residential aged care facilities. The pathways can be found at

[https://www.health.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0016/1005541/covid-19-management-racf.pdf](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/1005541/covid-19-management-racf.pdf)

The *Acute respiratory illness (suspected COVID-19) pathway* details isolation and treatment steps to be taken in managing suspected COVID-19 cases in residential aged care facilities. It can be found at [https://www.health.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0041/967379/covid-19-racf-pathway.pdf](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0041/967379/covid-19-racf-pathway.pdf)

## COVID-19 Residential Aged Care Facility Clinical Advisory Group

The COVID-19 Residential Aged Care Facility Clinical Advisory Group (RCAG) provides a collaborative forum for clinicians, consumer organisations and senior health system leaders to discuss the clinical considerations and challenges in responding to COVID-19 in Queensland public and private residential aged care facilities (RACFs).

# Testing

## Testing Strategies for Residential Aged Care

*The COVID-19 Testing Framework implementation Plan -Testing Strategies for Residential Aged Care* document aims to provide a framework for testing and early detection of COVID-19 in a residential aged care facility which considers the wellbeing, rights and dignity of individuals, including a priority focus on consent, advocacy and support for testing subjects.

The testing strategy can be found online at

[https://www.health.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0013/1005232/aged-care-covid-testing-strategy.pdf](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0013/1005232/aged-care-covid-testing-strategy.pdf)

## COVID-19 Testing - Booking and Triage Solution

The COVID-19 Testing - Booking and Triage Solution application clinically prioritises consumers for COVID-19 testing and identifies high risk individuals for priority testing (i.e. Healthcare Workers, Residential Aged Care Facility staff, vulnerable populations – persons 70 years or older and those that identify as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander).

# Assurance Processes

## Queensland Health-Run Residential Aged Care Facilities

In late May and early June 2020, the Department worked with Hospital and Health Services (HHSs) to assess the preparedness of Queensland Health-operated residential facilities. Two-person teams, which included a senior officer from policy and a nurse, conducted site visits to 15 public RACFs and four extended care facilities for people with disability. The work aimed to provide assurance of COVID-19 outbreak prevention and readiness, and to provide an opportunity for learning and improvement across the system.

The process identified that all have appropriate screening: temperature checks, questions, record keeping and all have outbreak plans. Chief Executives of HHS were also provided with feedback on insights gained from the Assurance Process to support continuous improvement.

## Multi-purpose Health Services (MPHS)

A COVID-19 assurance process for Multi-Purpose Health Services commenced in September 2020. Assurance interviews were conducted by videoconference and included a survey and reviews of processes by a two-person team comprising a Queensland Health senior officer from policy, and a Director of Nursing from the Office of the Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer. The process aimed to provide assurance about preparedness to respond to a COVID-19 incident in MPHSs.

## Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission - Risk Analysis

Queensland Health is working with the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (the Commission) to provide support and advice for the Commission's spot checks on private facilities. The results of these spot checks were used to inform facility level improvements and to provide a statewide picture of preparedness to support planning.

## Hospital and Health Service Support for Residential Aged Care Facilities

Queensland's Hospital and Health Services are also working with private residential aged care facilities within their respective catchments to build relationships; find collaborative solutions to support preparedness; and help ensure an effective response to COVID-19 outbreaks.

As at 31 March 2021, Hospital and Health Services have visited more than 95% of the state's aged care facilities to review preparedness and support a shared understanding of plans.

# Consultation and Communication

The Department of Health has established two key groups with which it consults to improve sector preparedness in relation to COVID-19 in aged care.

## COVID-19 Aged Care Working Group

The COVID-19 Aged Care Working Group comprises aged care sector stakeholders and provides expert advice, informed by front-line and provider insights. Working group membership includes:

- Sector peaks (Leading Aged Services Australia, Aged and Community Services Australia, Community Services Industry Alliance)
- Advocacy Bodies (Council on the Aging, Health Consumers Queensland, Palliative Care Queensland, Community Services Alliance, Carers Queensland, Aged and Disability Advocacy Australia, Palliative Care Queensland)
- The Commonwealth Department of Health
- The Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission
- The Public Advocate
- Primary Health Networks (Brisbane South and Brisbane North).

The Department regularly meets with the COVID-19 Aged Care Working Group (the Working Group) to discuss how COVID-19, and government responses to it, are impacting the sector, residents and families. The Working Group is consulted on a range of issues including amendments to the Aged Care Direction.

Liaison with the Working Group has also resulted in the development of sector guidance documents including a factsheet on ensuring a *COVID Safe Festive Season in Residential Aged Care*. This document can be found at

[https://www.health.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0016/1012705/covid-safe-festive-season-aged-care.pdf](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/1012705/covid-safe-festive-season-aged-care.pdf)

## Aged Care Leads Group

The Aged Care Leads Group comprises aged care specialists from Queensland Hospital and Health Services. It provides expert advice informed by front-line, and Hospital and Health service perspectives on matters related to Residential Aged Care in Queensland. It

- Provides a forum for Hospital and Health Service representatives with responsibility for, or a special interest in, Residential Aged Care.
- Supports development and implementation of key policy initiatives related to aged care, including systemic responses to identified issues.
- Shares learnings, themes, issues and innovative practices to improve the quality of residential aged care services.

During the pandemic, the Aged Care Leads Group has primarily focused on issues related to COVID-19 in aged care. It has provided a mechanism for information sharing, for example when intelligence about potential outbreaks becomes available and timely action is required. The group also provides assistance to activate resources at the local level to support incident management.

# Queensland Health Residential Aged Care Best Practice Network

The Queensland Health Residential Aged Care Best Practice Network was created in late 2019 to create a community of practice. Membership is made up of senior officers from each Queensland Health Residential Aged Care Facility and Multi-purpose Health Service and the Department.

On 27 April 2020, a special COVID-19 meeting was convened to discuss a range of issues including:

- An update on the Aged Care Direction
- Interactions with the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission
- An update on visitor restrictions
- An update on influenza vaccinations
- Information about communications and planning
- An overview of additional Commonwealth payments that had been announced

## Mailing List

The Department of Health has established a database of all providers in the state so that up to date information can be quickly and efficiently distributed and targeted to specific locations if required. This database has been used to disseminate information and advice about aged care directions. The clarity and timeliness of this approach has been well received by the sector.

## COVID-19 Web Content for Older Queenslanders

In the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, the department developed COVID-19-related web content for older Queenslanders. Drafted in plain English and made available on the Queensland Government's Older Queenslanders webpage, the material provided clear advice on steps to be taken to protect older members of the community and prevent the spread of COVID-19. It served as an important point of truth in the rapidly evolving environment.

Topics addressed included leaving the house, how to seek medical help, visiting and receiving visitors, access for home care services, staying connected, keeping physically and mentally well, advice for grey nomads and how older Queenslanders could access support.

The tailored advice was reviewed and updated to ensure its currency during the pandemic's evolution.

The information can be found at <https://www.qld.gov.au/health/conditions/health-alerts/coronavirus-covid-19/information-for/older-queenslanders>.

# COVID-19 Web Content for Residential Aged Care Sector

The Queensland Health website includes a dedicated area for COVID-19 resources relevant to the Aged Care Sector and clinicians working in the aged care sector.

The materials cover

- Pandemic Preparedness
- Individual resident and outbreak management resources
- Palliative care for aged care residents with COVID-19

This information can be accessed at <https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/novel-coronavirus-qld-clinicians/aged-care-sector>

## Communications Guidance

Queensland Health partnered with advocacy groups, including Health consumers Queensland, to develop comprehensive guidance to stakeholders about communications roles and responsibilities related to COVID-19.

*Guidance for Managing Communications and Engagement - COVID-19 in Residential Aged Care Facilities* provides general information to support aged care providers and government and other stakeholders to plan and deliver communications related to COVID-19 in residential aged care, including during outbreaks. It can be found at [https://www.health.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0024/1027536/aged-care-covid-guidance-comms-engagement.pdf](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0024/1027536/aged-care-covid-guidance-comms-engagement.pdf)

The guidance document is complemented by *Communications and Engagement Actions - COVID-19 in Residential Aged Care Facilities* which provides detailed information about the communication actions to be undertaken to prepare for and respond to COVID-19 in Residential Aged Care Facilities. This document can be found at [https://www.health.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0025/1027537/aged-care-covid-comms-engagement-actions.pdf](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0025/1027537/aged-care-covid-comms-engagement-actions.pdf).

These documents support providers to deliver clear, consistent and timely information, ensuring quality communication with staff, the local community and residents and their families and/or carers. They also clarify the Queensland Government's strategic approach to communication with RACFs, providers, the community and media.

## Outbreak Incident: Fairview Pinjarra Hills, Brookfield

Fairview Pinjarra Hills is a private residential aged care facility in the North West of Brisbane. At the time of the COVID incident it had 105 residents and 111 employees.

On the 31 July 2020, a close contact of two workers at the facility tested positive for COVID-19. The workers, who had last worked at the facility on 28 July 2020, self-isolated and presented for testing.

A joint response between the provider, the Hospital and Health Service, General Practitioners, and the Commonwealth Department of Health was rapidly implemented.

On the advice of Queensland health all residents were quarantined in their rooms and the facility was closed to visitors.

On 1 August 2020, one of the workers tested positive.

Test samples were taken from residents and staff. Residents were quarantined in their rooms and staff used PPE and worked in dedicated zones of the facility to reduce the risk of cross- infection.

On 2 August 2020 negative test results were returned for all residents and, on 3 August 2020, negative test results were returned for staff.

A program of re-testing commenced, and no further cases were identified in the facility.

# Hospital Interface

## Ensuring Inpatient Capacity

### Private Hospital Partnerships

Queensland Health has entered into COVID-19 partnership agreements with private hospitals. This helps to boost in-patient and workforce capacity, which can be used to support the residential aged care sector in responding to COVID-19.

### Data to Inform Decision Making and Reporting

The Department of health has improved the processes by which it obtains residential aged care occupancy data from the Commonwealth. This information helps the Department to work with the sector and to understand where potential capacity or constraints may exist.

The occupancy data is also utilised in the Department's regular dashboards. These documents provide snapshot information about the status of the aged care sector including available places in the sector and the number of long stay older patients in hospitals; strategy to respond to COVID-19; and actions taken to support the sector.

### Forecasting

The Department of Health has also developed improved forecasting capability to understand how the public and private hospital system can respond to outbreaks in RACFs.

### Emergency Department Interface

The Department's clinical analysis systems have been updated to include identifiable data from Aged Care residents and Home Care Package recipients. This helps clinical staff to identify people in this high risk/high priority cohort and also provides visibility of the person's COVID-19 testing status and results.

This approach supports a faster response if a positive test result is returned for someone living in residential aged care or receiving a home care package.

### Transition Care Places

Queensland Health also secured 20 additional transition care program places. These places have been allocated to Hospital and Health Services and will support the transition of patients from the hospital to aged care system in line with their care need, further supporting the hospital and aged care interface.

## Residential Aged Care Support Service (RaSS)

The RaSS model provides emergency assessment and care of residents with acute healthcare needs, in partnership with General Practitioners (GPs) and Residential Aged Care Facilities (RACFs). It improves resident choice of care setting and the quality and safety of care provided across the care continuum.

An additional \$15 million has been provided by Queensland Health to HHSs to allow rapid expansion of available RaSS service capacity and hours support to RACFs during the COVID pandemic period.

RaSS teams work collaboratively with Hospital in the Home (HITH), which received \$19 million in 2019-20 to expand capacity to ensure care could be provided in residents' homes where it was the resident's expressed wish and safe to do so.

RaSS and Geriatric Emergency Department Intervention (GEDI) teams have collaboratively established a community of practice including clinicians working across the continuum of care to support improved care to older persons.

During the COVID response, Clinical Excellence Queensland has established regular meetings of this community of practice to ensure clinicians responding to this cohort are updated with the latest evidence to support high quality response and clinical care.

## COVID-19 in Residential Aged Care – Approach to Transfer and Hospital Admissions

Noting the experience in other jurisdictions, Queensland supports the transfer of COVID positive residents to hospital where this is clinically appropriate and is supported by residents and families.

Queensland Health clinicians have developed guidelines for the transfer of aged care residents in the event of a COVID-19 incident at a residential aged care facility, which support decision making about when hospital transfers should occur. This document is available at [https://www.health.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0031/1006879/racf-resident-relocation-covid-outbreak.pdf](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0031/1006879/racf-resident-relocation-covid-outbreak.pdf)

The Department has also issued guidance on the care of residential aged care residents attending an acute healthcare facility during a pandemic. This document is available at [https://www.health.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/1005291/racf-transitions-between-hospital-guide.pdf](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/1005291/racf-transitions-between-hospital-guide.pdf)

## Hospital in the Home (HITH)

HITH provides care in a patient's permanent or temporary residence for conditions requiring clinical governance, monitoring and/or input that would otherwise require treatment in the traditional inpatient hospital bed.

HITH can provide care in the Residential Aged Care Facility for residents when the level of care can be delivered in the RACF and the care aligns to the patient wishes

# Palliative Care

A range of initiatives have been progressed to expand access to palliative care in residential aged care and the community.

The palliPHARM project has been funded to ensure palliative care patients in residential aged care and the community have timely access to palliative care medication and assistance. This is supported by:

- the expansion of the PallConsult telephone service
- promotion of caring@home and other relevant resources that help people to manage end-of-life symptoms at home and
- activities that support timely prescribing and provision of medicines to patients in these settings.

Parallel to this, Clinical Excellence Queensland has delivered a project identifying the availability and use of medicine imprest systems in residential aged care facilities, and Queensland has signed up to the national Comprehensive Palliative Care in Aged Care Measure which supports improvements in palliative care in residential aged care. The latter will be implemented by Clinical Excellence Queensland through the Specialist Palliative Care in Aged Care (SPACE) project which will consolidate insights derived from the COVID-19 response with longer term reform trajectories in the delivery of palliative care in residential aged care.

Together these activities help ensure residents of aged care can access end-of-life care in a timely way, supporting both the pandemic response and long-term service delivery.

## Guidance for People in Quarantine Visiting Residents Receiving End of Life Care

Queensland Health has also prepared *Guidance for People in Quarantine Visiting Residents Receiving End of Life Care*. This advice has been prepared to assist residential aged care facilities, hospitals, hospices and shared disability accommodation services manage visits to residents/patients receiving end-of-life care from persons who are in government mandated quarantine because of travel from an area affected by COVID-19.

The guidance is available at

[https://www.health.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0016/1014280/eol-visits-facilities.pdf](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/1014280/eol-visits-facilities.pdf)

## Principles of Palliative Care for Residents of Residential Aged Care Facilities during COVID-19

The Department has developed high level principles underpinning the proactive, coordinated and effective palliative care to be delivered by healthcare professionals for residential aged care facility (RACF) palliative residents during the COVID-19 pandemic. The document promotes consideration of the delivery of palliative care within an integrated

cross jurisdictional response at a system level. Such delivery requires appropriate leadership with proportionate care available to all those in need, irrespective of their group membership (e.g. gender, ethnicity, disability or religious belief) and COVID-19 status, and contextualised flexibly to individual RACF environments.

## Participation on the Palliative Care Queensland Sector Working Group

Through its participation on the Palliative Care Queensland Sector Working Group, Queensland Health has provided advice and assisted in the development of a number of resources by [Palliative Care Queensland](#). These activities support the delivery appropriate palliative care delivery in Residential Aged Care Facilities.

### Outbreak Incident North Rockhampton Nursing Centre

North Rockhampton Nursing Centre (NRNC) is a public residential aged care facility located in the Central Queensland Hospital and Health Service (CQHHS).

At the time of the incident, the facility was home to 115 residents across 3 wings with 149 staff.

On 14 May 2020, a staff member at the facility was identified as COVID-19 positive. The staff member reported symptoms on 5 May 2020. The infectious period was considered to be from 3 May 2020 onwards. During this time, until the positive COVID-19 result was available, the staff member continued to work a total of seven shifts in a non-clinical administrative role.

CQHHS and Queensland Health implemented a rapid response and enacted the local disaster management plan. Contact tracing and testing regimens were implemented.

To support the self-quarantine of the close contact residents, a total of 102 residents relocated from the NRNC to enable quarantine in single rooms with ensuites. This included 35 residents who were moved offsite to two private hospitals and four residents who moved into Rockhampton Hospital.

The outbreak was declared over on 29 May 2020.

# Continuous Improvement

## Learnings

The Department of Health has collated and disseminated summaries of learnings from other jurisdictions to internal and external stakeholders.

On 24 July 2020, the Chief Executive of Central Queensland Hospital and Health Service and the Assistant Deputy Director-General, Prevention Division, Queensland Health participated in a forum organised by Aged and Community Services Australia.

On 21 December 2020, Queensland Health delivered a Grand Rounds Panel Session to share learnings to support pandemic planning and preparedness in responding to COVID-19 outbreaks in Residential Aged Care Facilities (RACFs). The Grand Rounds Panel Session was also an opportunity to raise awareness of roles and responsibilities, in an effort to strengthen pandemic planning, preparedness, and future responses by RACF providers. A recording of the session is available online at

<https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/novel-coronavirus-qld-clinicians/aged-care-sector>

## Next Steps

Queensland health is supporting the priority roll out of COVID-19 vaccinations to vulnerable populations including aged care residents and staff. While this is a Commonwealth responsibility, Queensland Health will monitor the roll out and provide a conduit for information exchange between the aged care sector and other stakeholders and the Commonwealth Government.

It will also maintain readiness and continue to plan for a potentially more severe second wave of COVID-19 and consider how to mitigate its impact on the residential aged care sector. Key areas of focus for 2021 include

1. Implementing the Aged Care Health Emergency Response Operations Centre
2. Revisiting and strengthening workforce approaches
3. Continuing intergovernmental liaison including negotiation of partnership agreements and progression of joint initiatives

Existing documents and protocols will be updated based on policy changes, learnings and new evidence.

The Department will also continue to share learnings from aged care outbreaks in other jurisdictions via reports and seminars.

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