

23 March 2020

CEO Message to Residents, Families and Visitors

As you know, Uniting AgeWell (UA) made the difficult decision to close its aged care residences to all visitors on 17 March for an initial period of 14 days. This decision includes residents remaining within the facility during the restricted access period.

We do understand the anxiety and concern this causes and we sincerely apologise for that, but we also note the relief shown by many individuals and families who had expressed concern as to why we hadn't made this decision earlier.

Uniting AgeWell acknowledges there is conflicting opinion and advice in the community around visitor restrictions in residential aged care, with other providers also opting to implement similar measures. We expect this will be an area of public debate over the coming days.

Uniting AgeWell has taken a firm stance on visitor restriction following a number of near miss incidents, whereby some visitors had shown a total disregard for the risk COVID-19 poses to aged care residents, and the travel and hygiene precautions we already had in place. This included visitors who presented at our homes showing symptoms of respiratory illness, or having recently returned from or having had direct contact with returned overseas travellers.

Uniting AgeWell has made this decision in the best interests of all residents and staff.

We remain extremely concerned with regard to the rapid spread of COVID-19 within the Australian community and the predicted growth in infection rates over the coming weeks. It is another reason why both visitor access and community access for residents is restricted unless in exceptional circumstances.

We fully appreciate and respect the strong emotional bonds and important role family and friends play in the lives of residents, however our first priority must continue to be the health and safety of all people in our care and our staff during this unprecedented situation.

How we're helping residents and families stay connected

We are actively encouraging and supporting the use of mobile devices and doing whatever we can to procure more mobile devices for each of our homes (with appropriate hygiene precautions) to ensure that families can continue to connect with loved ones via skype or FaceTime. We urge families and friends to keep up their telephone calls, cards and letters to their family members. Our Managers will also keep families well informed through regular updates and conversations.

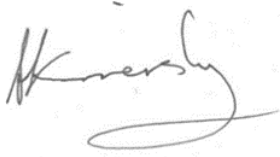
All of our residences have increased their in-house lifestyle programs and the range of individual and small group activities on offer (mindful of social distancing requirements) and are providing extra care and support to reduce feelings of anxiety and social isolation. Our chaplains are also providing pastoral care support.

Uniting AgeWell staff are doing an amazing job and working extremely hard to support those in our care during what is a particularly challenging time for everyone and I thank them for their ongoing commitment.

Uniting AgeWell's position on visitor restriction will continue to be monitored on a daily basis as will our response to COVID-19.

We thank you for your understanding and cooperation as we all work together to protect the most vulnerable people in our community.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Kinnersly', with a large, sweeping flourish underneath.

Andrew Kinnersly
Chief Executive Officer
Uniting AgeWell