

29 April 2020

CORONAVIRUS UPDATE #6 – VISITOR RESTRICTIONS AT UNITING AGEWELL TASMANIAN RESIDENTIAL CARE FACILITIES TO REMAIN IN PLACE

Last week I wrote to you about visitor access restrictions across Uniting AgeWell's residential care facilities which were introduced on 17 March 2020 in response to the increasing prevalence of COVID-19 in Victoria and Tasmania and the very real risk this presented to our residents and staff.

The decision to introduce the no visitor policy during the pandemic reflected not only the concerns we had about the increased risk of transmission, but those of many residents, families and staff. While we know it has been a very difficult and challenging time for everyone, the overwhelming majority have supported our position and we thank you for your trust, cooperation and understanding.

We strongly believe this decision, in addition to the other precautionary measures we have in place, has been instrumental in keeping the virus out of our homes and the vulnerable people in our care safe. Throughout this time, the care of residents and their physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing has been paramount.

While transmission rates within the broader community have thankfully reduced, now is not the time to become complacent. We must all remain vigilant and do everything we possibly can to safeguard the health and wellbeing of residents and staff. We continue to see in Australia and around the world, the devastating impact of COVID-19 in residential aged care. Keeping visitors to an absolute minimum, together with social distancing and other precautionary measures remains an effective infection prevention strategy.

As advised last week, Uniting AgeWell has been in the process of reviewing visitor restrictions, and assessing how we can ease visitor restrictions in a safe, gradual and controlled manner, mindful that the pandemic is ongoing, there remain localised COVID-19 hotspots and areas of higher risk, and legally binding State Government directives.

In Tasmania, these directives mean that visits to residential aged care facilities are not allowed unless there are exceptional circumstances (as prescribed in the directive), noting also there are additional community restrictions in place for North West Tasmania.

So for now, Uniting AgeWell's visitor restrictions in Tasmania will remain in place. We will continue to monitor the situation in Tasmania and as soon as it is safe to do so, we will seek to ease visitor restrictions. We anticipate giving an update with regards to our position on Monday, 4 May coinciding with the expected release of revised Tasmanian Government directives.

Influenza vaccination

As mentioned in previous correspondence, from 1 May 2020 it is a mandatory Government requirement for all staff, contractors and visitors to residential aged care, which includes family and friends, to have a current influenza (flu) vaccination before they can enter the facility.

Uniting AgeWell is required to seek and record appropriate evidence of an individual's influenza immunisation status prior to entry to the facility.

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We kindly ask that you arrange your 2020 influenza vaccination and provide evidence of the vaccination at your earliest convenience. Evidence can be provided in the form of a statement or record from a health practitioner; or an immunisation history statement available from Medicare online or the Express Plus Medicare mobile app.

The only permissible exemption for a family member is on medical grounds, where the vaccine will negatively affect a pre-existing health condition. You will need to provide evidence of such a medical exemption from your health practitioner. There are no provisions for exemption based on cultural or religious reasons.

Our influenza vaccination program for residents is also in progress across all of our services.

Keeping in touch

During visitor restrictions, Uniting AgeWell remains absolutely committed to maintaining and supporting resident and family connections through telephone calls and the very successful and well received “virtual visits” via technology and other means.

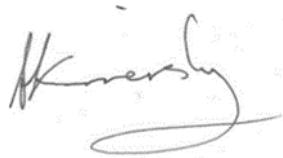
Residents continue to be actively engaged in activities they enjoy and social interactions within the home, with appropriate social distancing.

Please don't hesitate to contact your Residential Services Manager if you would like further assistance to stay in touch or you have any concerns about your family member's wellbeing.

I would like to take this opportunity to encourage all members of the community to download the Australian Government's COVIDSafe app which has been designed to help keep the community safe from further spread of coronavirus through early notification of possible exposure.

Again, I want to thank you for your ongoing support and cooperation as we navigate through this next phase of the pandemic.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kinnersly', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Andrew Kinnersly
Chief Executive Officer
Uniting AgeWell