

Friday 7 January 2021

Dear families and carers,

I felt it timely to contact each of you to provide a general update on the COVID-19 situation in our aged care homes in NSW & ACT. We are all aware of the escalating situation across the country with the Omicron variant of COVID-19, and aged care homes are experiencing many of the issues our wider health system is also facing.

In the face of rapidly increasing community transmission, the clear focus for us is supporting the safety and wellbeing of our residents and staff. This creates significant pressure on our workforce, with the additional practices in place compared to usual.

Much has changed in these last few weeks. At the time of writing, we have 16 of our 18 homes in exposure or outbreak mode as declared by health authorities, and we are doing our best to manage the situation at each of these homes. Aged care homes and providers right across the country are experiencing this same level of impact and together we are sharing our concerns and challenges with all levels of Government.

We are also acutely aware that residents and their families have been separated from each other on many occasions during this two-year-long pandemic. It is always difficult to close our homes or restrict visitation. We are doing our very best with health authorities to balance the safety of everyone as a priority while also understanding the impact that closures and restrictions have on you and residents and their wellbeing. For this reason, all of our BaptistCare homes provide for essential care and end of life visitation during any closure.

At this time, I want to share with you how you can help, and I thank those families who have reached out to offer words of support and acknowledgement of the difficult circumstances we are operating in.

### **How you can help us at this time**

There are some ways we'd really appreciate your help:

- We ask for your understanding and patience if we have to close a home in part or in full. The decision to close or reopen a home is made with, and by, health authorities. We will always seek to provide safe visiting options and/or connection options for visitors, and freedom of movement for residents where it is safe to do so.
- Our priority will always be on the direct care of residents, which is the focus for our staffing approach and deployment. This sometimes impacts our capacity to offer safe visiting options. We ask for your support by minimising calls to our homes on less important matters, and being respectful towards our staff at all times.
- For homes where visitation is available, we are managing this carefully to ensure visitors do not inadvertently bring COVID-19 into the home. We ask for your understanding if visitation requirements change without notice, including requiring visitors to have a Rapid Antigen Test and/or wear Personal Protective Equipment such as a mask provided by the home.
- If your home is impacted by COVID-19 an updates webpage will be established, and we ask you to check the home's updates webpage each day for information, rather than calling the home.
- Where residents can be taken out of the home on excursions, we strongly recommend that you do not take your loved one out unless it is absolutely necessary. If you take your loved one out, please exercise caution, apply good social distancing, hand hygiene, and wear a mask. Please be mindful that if a resident does test positive on return to the home, they will

need to isolate, health authorities will be advised, and it is likely that part or all of the home will need to close while health authorities investigate. This impacts many of us.

### How we manage an outbreak

We work closely with NSW or ACT Health, local area health and the Commonwealth Department of Health as part of an Outbreak Management Team to manage and direct the response to COVID-19.

Our outbreak management plans for each home are robust and include the following measures:

- Additional monitoring of residents through temperature checking, Rapid Antigen Testing (RAT) and/or PCR testing as directed by health authorities.
- Staff are wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- Staff do not work across different areas of the home, and movement is restricted.
- We continue to RAT all staff before they enter the home and begin work

Communication with families and residents is a really important component of our outbreak response. We value transparency and accuracy of information, and although we don't get it right every time, we are genuinely committed to keeping our families informed and up to date.

On every home's update webpage we will report case numbers relating to resident/s who test positive to COVID-19. With the reporting of staff numbers, we're changing the way we report cases from this point onward and will no longer provide a staff tally. The reason for this decision is that many of our staff are testing positive outside of the home. For example, while they are on leave and have not worked during their infectious period, or, when they have been tested positive via a Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) before entering the home, meaning they have not attended work.

### Cause for hope

Finally, vaccination has given us hope in this outbreak. Many people who are testing positive have no symptoms, and others have mild symptoms. Nevertheless, we care for the most frail and vulnerable in our community, and the impacts of this wave of COVID-19 will be felt for a long time.

I am extremely proud of our teams right across our homes, and I am hearing from you that you are also grateful for their commitment and care. There is an incredible team of people caring for your loved on. Our carers and managers are the absolute heartbeat of all we do, and they are turning up day after day to do their very best under difficult circumstances.

We will get through this together, so I again thank you for your support at this time.

Sincerely,



Allan Waters  
General Manager, Residential Services and Retirement Living