

30 September 2020

## **CHANGES TO VISITOR ACCESS GUIDELINES AT UNITING AGEWELL RESIDENTIAL CARE FACILITIES IN VICTORIA**

It has been an extremely challenging year for the entire Victorian community as we all grapple with the impact of community transmission of COVID-19 and the significant restrictions that were put in place by the Victorian Government in a bid to reduce the number of cases. As we have all witnessed, the impact of COVID-19 on residential aged care has been devastating and our hearts go out to all those individuals directly affected.

The Uniting AgeWell family is extremely proud of the fact that all 20 homes that we operate have remained free of COVID-19 and that no resident has tested positive to COVID-19. Whilst there is no doubt we have been fortunate, it is also clear that our unyielding commitment to ensure safety for residents and staff has dramatically reduced the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

Aside from effective pandemic preparation and outbreak management, skilled staff and resourcing, I believe this outcome has also been due to the wonderful support and cooperation we have received from residents and their families who have had to endure strict visitor restrictions. I know it has been extremely tough on you all.

The decreasing number of new cases of the virus in Victoria has led to an easing of restrictions in regional Victoria and hopefully by the end of October we will see this easing applied to metropolitan Melbourne, which is still under Stage 4 restrictions. Nevertheless, we have reviewed our visitor restrictions in light of the current situation and the updated Victorian Government Care Facilities Directions (No 12) which came into effect on 27 September.

Despite the number of cases of community transmission decreasing, any level of community transmission presents an extreme risk to residential aged care; there are still over 60 homes in Victoria with active cases. It is important to keep the number of people entering the facility to a minimum. As a result, it remains our absolute preference that virtual visits and contact via electronic means continue as the safest form of connection between residents and families.

However, we do understand the emotional strain this causes. Therefore, where face-to-face visits are essential, pre-booked visits can be arranged on the following basis with effect **from Thursday 1 October 2020**:

- Where it is deemed that connection via electronic or other “non-contact” means is not appropriate or suitable, residents may receive one visitor per day for care and support visits for a maximum duration of two hours (in line with the current Government Directions). That said, Uniting AgeWell encourages visits of a shorter duration. Shorter visits will assist with the ongoing need for restricting numbers present at any given time and will support the requirement for important measures such as social distancing.
- Visiting hours will be from 10am to 12 noon and from 1pm to 3pm Monday to Friday, and from 10am to 12 noon on Saturday where this can be accommodated by the facility.
- Additionally, compassionate visits for end-of-life care can be arranged for up to two visitors per visit, and these visits have no time limit.

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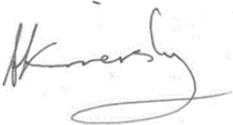
- We will offer flexibility for those family members who may have difficulty visiting during the scheduled visiting hours due to work or other challenging circumstances; please contact the Residential Services Manager should you have any issues or concerns and we will always aim to support individual circumstances.
- Precautionary measures remain in place, including pre-screening requirements (temperature checks and the completion of a legally binding Declaration form) every time a visitor enters the facility. If you do not meet the entry criteria you will not be permitted to enter. This is to ensure everyone's safety.
- All visitors must wear a face mask and adhere to hand hygiene and social distancing requirements. We also ask that visitors follow and respect the guidance of staff.
- In line with the current Government Directions, children under 16 years of age are only permitted for palliative care visits.

As you can appreciate, facilitating safe visits, carefully managing risk and ensuring staff can continue to focus on caring for residents is a delicate balance. We will continue to review visiting arrangements on an ongoing basis, taking into account the current pandemic situation and associated risks. As soon as it is safe to do so, we will facilitate more flexible visiting.

I would like to again sincerely thank residents and families for their patience and understanding over these past months. While some easing of restrictions is very welcome, we must continue to be vigilant and take every precaution necessary to ensure the ongoing health, safety and wellbeing of all those in our care.

Thank you again for your ongoing support and cooperation.

Yours sincerely



**Andrew Kinnersly**  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
**Uniting AgeWell**