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Australian Government
Department of Health and Ageing

Any **queries** regarding your responsibilities should be directed to the **Aged Care Complaints Investigation Scheme on 1800 550 552.**

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To: Residential Aged Care Service Providers
From: Department of Health and Ageing
Date: 3 February 2009
No. of pages: 3 including cover page
Subject: Resident Comfort during Heat Wave
Comment: Attached is a reminder from the Senior Nurse Adviser, Office of Aged Care Quality and Compliance, regarding your obligations to resident care during the heat wave conditions that some states are currently experiencing.

AGEING AND AGED CARE

*Supporting
healthy ageing
for older
Australians and
quality,
cost-effective
care for frail
older people as
well as support
for their carers.*

Stay informed - please let us know if your contact details change by using the following link:
<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ageing-contacts-subscribe.htm>

Aged Care Information Line 1800 500 853
Commonwealth Carelink Centres 1800 052 222
National Continence Helpline 1800 330 066
National Dementia Helpline 1800 100 500
Aged Care Complaints Investigation Scheme 1800 550 552



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**IMPORTANT REMINDER FOR APPROVED PROVIDERS OF
RESIDENTIAL AGED CARE SERVICES
RE: RESIDENT COMFORT DURING HEAT WAVE**

Dear residential aged care service provider,

As several States are currently experiencing extremely high temperatures, I would like to remind you of the impact that this weather may have on the frail, older people in your care.

Residents of aged care homes are amongst those most at risk of heat-related illness, with high day and evening temperatures not allowing for buildings to cool off as they normally would. Due to normal aged-related changes to the body older people do not always recognise that they are overheated. They also do not sweat as much as a younger people. Elderly people are more prone to heat stress than younger people because their body may not adjust well to sudden temperature change. They are more likely to have a chronic medical condition and to be taking medication that may interfere with the body's ability to regulate fluid.

Residents, therefore, may not complain about being hot. Importantly they may not request additional fluids. Some residents of course are not capable of communicating their needs and depend on your staff to assess their ongoing clinical care requirements.

To assist the comfort of residents and for you to meet the requirements of the *Aged Care Act 1997*, particularly Outcome 2 (Health and Personal Care) and Outcome 4 (Physical Environment and Safe System) of the Accreditation Standards you should:


- Ensure that the temperature in residents' rooms and within the facility is kept comfortable;
- Use portable air conditioners, coolers and fans if the building is not airconditioned;
- Offer fluids frequently - fluids should be provided every hour (your clinical assessment will determine the needs of those residents on fluid restricted

diets). Small amounts of fluid regularly is generally more acceptable than large amounts of fluids offered less frequently;

- Consider alternative forms of fluid, such as jelly, ice cream or fruit ice blocks;
- Monitor fluid intake and output carefully, so that clinical staff are immediately aware of possible dehydration;
- Ensure that residents' clothing is loose fitting;
- Offer tepid showers or sponging; and
- Keep curtains and blinds closed, to reduce some of the impact of the excess heat.

The effects of heat-related illnesses can range from mild conditions such as a rash or cramps to very serious conditions such as severe confusion or heat stroke. Heat may also worsen the condition of someone who already has a medical condition such as heart disease.

If there are any concerns about a resident's well being his or her medical practitioner should be immediately contacted.



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Department of Health & Ageing
2 February 2009