



# FACT SHEET:

## IN-HOME CARE WORKERS

Coronavirus  
(COVID-19)

6 April 2020

Our health care and in-home care workers are at the frontline of protecting older Australians from COVID-19. It is crucial that we support and protect them.

This information sheet should be read in conjunction with the 'What you need to know' and 'Isolation guidance' information sheets found at [www.health.gov.au/covid19-resources](http://www.health.gov.au/covid19-resources).

### Why do we need to take particular care to protect older Australians?

As health workers are aware, the risk of serious illness from COVID-19 increases with age. The highest rate of fatalities to date is among older people, particularly those with other serious health conditions or a weakened immune system. Australians over 70 years of age, over 65 years of age with existing health conditions, and Indigenous Australian over the age of 50 with existing health conditions are particularly at risk from COVID-19.

For people living with dementia or some form of cognitive impairment, the ability to follow instruction or to alert others about potential symptoms may be a challenge. This is especially so where there is a limited capacity to communicate verbally or express pain and discomfort.

### Can I go to work?

As an in-home care worker you are providing an essential service. Home care services should be still delivered to care recipients with necessary precautions in place (see below) but it is vitally important during this unprecedented time that continuity of service by providers is maintained and that we all stay connected.

To keep care recipients safe you must not go to work and must alert your employer in the following circumstances:

- If you have returned from overseas in the last 14 days,
- If you have been in contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19, or
- If you have a fever, or you have any symptoms of respiratory illness (e.g. cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose or nasal congestion).



If you are in a group who are considered vulnerable to more serious infection (including aged over 70 years, non-Indigenous and are aged 65 years or older with a chronic illness or are Indigenous and aged 50 years or older with a chronic illness) you should discuss with your employer how best to manage your own risk at work.

### **How can I help prevent the spread of coronavirus?**

There is currently no vaccination to prevent COVID-19. Avoiding exposure is the single most important way to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

To protect those in your care you must ensure that you:

- Practise and encourage good hand hygiene and good cough/sneeze etiquette.
- Depending on anticipated exposure, wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).
- If you are not undertaking direct care duties, maintain a distance of 1.5 metres from home-care recipients and Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) clients.

You should continue to use standard precautions for preventing infection in all residents at all times. Standard precautions include hand hygiene before and after every episode of physical contact. Additional precautions will be necessary should there be a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 in your care facility.

For further information on how you can protect yourself and those in your care, you are encouraged to complete the COVID-19 training available here: [www.covid-19training.gov.au](http://www.covid-19training.gov.au)

This training includes infection prevention and control training module designed for health care workers in all settings, as well as aged care specific training. If you are having trouble and can't access the aged care specific training email [support@covid-19training.gov.au](mailto:support@covid-19training.gov.au) for a priority response.

### **What about influenza vaccinations for in-home care workers?**

While it is not compulsory for in-home aged care workers to receive the influenza vaccination to continue working, we strongly encourage all staff and volunteers to receive the influenza vaccination this year if available to them. Ensuring staff and volunteers are vaccinated against influenza will not only provide protection for staff but also an additional layer of protection for care recipients, who are more vulnerable to serious complications from influenza.

For more information about the influenza vaccine see: <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/immunisation/immunisation-services/flu-influenza-immunisation-service>

### **What about workers with visa work restrictions?**

New visa arrangements are available to support the aged care workforce. Aged care providers can now temporarily offer more hours to international students to help ensure the continuity of care of older Australians.

These changes apply to both residential and home care.



They are temporary measures and are designed to address any staff shortages caused by COVID-19. We need to support workforce continuity across the aged care sector in case a large part of the workforce is unable to come to work. Providers will ensure all staff are adequately trained.

For further information about this temporary measure and what you need to do to access these new arrangements, please contact the Department of Home Affairs on **131 881** or email [SVCR@homeaffairs.gov.au](mailto:SVCR@homeaffairs.gov.au)

### **How can care recipients get urgent access to CHSP or other additional services if their care needs change due to COVID-19?**

In the first instance, an individual seeking access to new or additional aged care services should contact My Aged Care on **1800 200 422** to discuss their aged care needs, have their client record created or updated and arrange for an assessment.

In cases where CHSP services are required for urgent and immediate care needs, a service provider may commence delivering services to a client before they have contacted My Aged Care and received an assessment. This provision is only intended to take effect where it is clear that urgent and immediate care is required to ensure client health or safety (e.g. the unplanned absence of a carer or the provision of essential support to a client in isolation due to COVID-19).

The delivery of these services should be time-limited with the service provider assisting the client to contact and register (where necessary) with My Aged Care as soon as possible. Where urgent CHSP services are put in place for six weeks or less due to COVID-19, an assessment (or support plan review for existing clients) will not be required. Where urgent services are put in place for longer than six weeks, a follow up assessment (or support plan review) must be arranged.

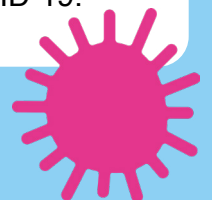
In non-urgent circumstances, services should not commence before an assessment. CHSP providers must continue to only deliver services they are funded to deliver (e.g. they cannot start delivering domestic assistance when they are only funded for flexible respite).

Home care package care recipients can also access CHSP services on a time limited basis in emergency situations when their package is fully allocated. The service provider assisting the client will still need to contact My Aged Care and register the client. An assessment should be scheduled at a later date where appropriate.

### **What if care recipients want to cease their Home Care Package Service?**

There are multiple reasons why a care recipient, or their representative, may ask to stop receiving care and services. If their circumstances have changed due to COVID-19, home care providers can offer to review the person's care plan and adjust their package of care and services.

If a client is concerned about exposure to COVID-19, providers can note their ongoing responsibility to prevent and control infection and detail their actions to manage COVID-19.



If a client decides they do not want to receive care or services, they should be advised to suspend, or 'take leave' from their package. This qualifies as 'social leave' and is subject to the usual provisions found here <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/home-care-packages-program/managing-home-care-packages/temporary-leave-from-home-care-packages#social-leave>

A care recipient's security of tenure is not affected by the choice to take leave. They must, however, notify you that they are choosing to take leave from their package and specify the date that leave commences. This notification is not required to be in writing, but providers need to record the leave dates, and how and who informed them of the leave.

Section 11 of the Home Care Packages Program Operational Manual: A guide for home care providers outlines what providers need to do if someone wants to take leave from receiving services under their package. The Manual is available here: <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/home-care-packages-program-operational-manual-a-guide-for-home-care-providers>

### **How are assessments being conducted during COVID-19?**

Telephone and Telehealth aged care assessments will be adopted as the default approach for community assessments by ACATs and RAS until further notice. Face to face assessments are still permitted where necessary to support the needs of the client. This will be reviewed as the situation evolves. All assessment organisations are also being asked to increase welfare checks with care recipients during this period.

### **What should I advise my staff in these challenging times?**

One of the important messages is the value of basic standard hygiene (hand washing, cough etiquette, social distancing) in preventing transmission.

As trusted care providers in our community, your assistance in communicating this message to your workforce, senior Australians, their families and friends is appreciated.

Employers should provide information and brief all employees, contract staff and volunteers, including domestic and cleaning staff where applicable, on relevant information and procedures to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

You should inform staff who have been in close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case to remain isolated in their home. Workers should seek medical advice and advise their employer if they develop symptoms during the isolation period.

Public health authorities may contact employers in the event an employee, contract staff or volunteer is suspected or confirmed to have coronavirus.



## Will I have access to additional Government payments?

The Australian Government has agreed to additional temporary funding to support Aged Care providers and workers as we face the challenge of coronavirus.

One element of this temporary funding is a 'retention bonus payment to eligible full-time direct care workers.

- Full-time home care workers will receive payments of up to \$600 per quarter, for two quarters. This includes workers providing clinical care, personal care, cleaning, home support activities and meal preparation, social support, shopping, community access and transport, allied health and respite.

There will be pro rata payments for eligible part time and casual workers.

Payments are expected to be made in June and September for the preceding three month period. Details about the exact timing of payments and how they will be made will be advised in due course.

Workers who are unable to attend work because they have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or who are in isolation may qualify for Sickness Allowance (or JobSeeker Payment from 20 March 2020) if they do not have any employer leave entitlements, such as sick leave, and they meet general eligibility requirements in respect of residency, and income and asset tests.

Young people under the age of 22 who are unable to attend work because they have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or who are in isolation may qualify for Youth Allowance if they meet the same requirements.

For more information on the Jobseeker Payment, visit Services Australia

<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/>

## More information

To protect older Australians and those with compromised immune systems we all need to work together to help stop the spread of COVID-19.

For the latest advice, information and resources, go to [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au)

Call the National Coronavirus Help Line on **1800 020 080**. It operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you require translating or interpreting services, call **131 450**.

If you or a family member are in crisis, please contact Lifeline on **13 11 14**.

The Australian Government's mental health response is available at: <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020/03/covid-19-national-health-plan-supporting-the-mental-health-of-australians-through-the-coronavirus-pandemic.pdf>

The phone number of each state or territory public health agency is available at

[www.health.gov.au/state-territory-contacts](http://www.health.gov.au/state-territory-contacts).

If you have concerns about your health, speak to your doctor.

