



Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Information for Short-Term Restorative Care (STRC) Providers

During the pandemic, Short-Term Restorative Care (STRC) clients may not be able to access services they need. This might be due to isolation or quarantine requirements, health advice or other factors.

This fact sheet is to assist STRC providers during this time.

COVID-19 – general impact on program delivery

COVID-19 may mean that face-to-face assessments and/or care provision present a risk to staff or STRC clients. In this case you might need to adjust the way you provide your service. This might include the use of phone and/or telehealth assessment.

It is important to protect yourself and your clients from COVID-19. We must also stop the spread of the virus. Maintaining good hygiene and a clean workplace is essential. Advice on environmental cleaning and disinfection is available at www.health.gov.au and searching using the term aged care cleaning.

All aged care workers entering clients' homes must practise good infection control. We encourage all aged care workers to complete the aged care and infection control training modules. These are available at www.health.gov.au and searching using the term COVID-19 Infection control training. Make sure to register as an aged care worker to get access to all modules.

COVID-19 mandatory vaccination requirements

On 17 September 2021 COVID-19 vaccination became mandatory for all residential aged care workers. Further information is available at www.health.gov.au and searching the term mandatory vaccination aged care.

These requirements apply to workers delivering STRC in a residential aged care facility, however, they do not extend to STRC care delivered in community settings.

COVID-19 – mandatory reporting of vaccination status

It is mandatory for STRC service providers to keep records and report on the COVID-19 vaccination status of their workforce.

STRC service providers are required to submit de-identified data at a service level every Tuesday on the My Aged Care provider portal on the:

- total number of workers at each aged care service and, of those,
- the number of workers at each service who have received a single dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, and

- the number of workers at each service who have received all required doses of a COVID-19 vaccine.

Please note these new reporting requirements relate to obligations on providers to report workers' COVID-19 vaccination status where STRC is provided in a residential or a community setting. They do not, however, impose any obligation for STRC workers in a community setting to be vaccinated.

Steps on how to report the COVID-19 vaccination status of aged care workers are available via the [Quick Reference Guide](#) and also the [My Aged Care Provider Portal User Guide](#) on page 84 (2.6.1).

Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT) assessments

Due to COVID-19, ACATs are taking a flexible approach to the delivery of assessments.

Decisions on how to conduct assessments are guided by the ACATs' local circumstances and client choice. Face-to-face assessments should be offered where it is possible and safe. ACATs do, however, have protocols in place to return to telephone assessments should a local outbreak occur.

If necessary, emergency provisions under the *Aged Care Act 1997* (the Act) can be used during the COVID-19 outbreak.

For more information on streamlined ACAT assessment processes, please contact your ACAT assessor teams.

Breaks in care

You cannot suspend (i.e. take leave from) an episode of STRC for a period of more than seven days. This timeframe is unable to be extended. Section 111C (5) of the [Subsidy Principles 2014](#) sets this out.

You should cease the client's current episode where:

- their STRC episode is interrupted, and
- they are unable to recommence after the seven day leave period.

If this is the client's first episode of STRC, pending ACAT approval, they can commence another episode when they are ready. As the person cannot receive more than two episodes of STRC in any 12-month period, this does not apply if the client's second episode is ceased.

If the client can commence another episode and would continue to benefit from STRC, the provider can make a support plan review request through the provider portal to request the ACAT delegate's approval for the second episode.

In the request you must include as much detail as possible to explain the client's circumstances. You can contact the ACAT to discuss the situation. You will need to note if the client's care needs have changed. The ACAT will contact the client to undertake the review and determine next steps.

Provider unable to service clients due to staffing shortages

During the pandemic you may be unable to provide a service to clients due to staffing shortages. If this occurs you should update your service and availability information through the My Aged Care Provider portal. This will help to prevent referrals from the assessor and contact centre to your organisation.

You can also provide this advice to the My Aged Care through the Service Provider Helpline (**1800 836 799**).

You should try to subcontract staff for existing clients from elsewhere. If no staff are available, consider transferring existing clients to other providers.

Care plan reviews

During the pandemic providing a face-to-face care plan review may present a risk to STRC clients or staff. We encourage you to use other options such as phone or telehealth. If you're unable to undertake a final case review, you should still maintain contact with the client. This will help to meet the STRC goals and objectives. Plan to conduct the final review at a suitable time. This may be after the client has exited from the programme.

Note progress and outcomes of the STRC episode on the client record through the My Aged Care provider portal. If the episode is unable to be finalised note this on the client record. My Aged Care portal users, such as clients, assessors and the contact centre can view this information. Who can view the note depends on the note's access controls.

Access to allied health services and telehealth

During the pandemic some allied health professionals may restrict their contact with clients. This means they may not be available to deliver STRC services face to face. Allied health professionals may offer telehealth services (video-conferencing or telephone attendance). If they do not use telehealth, you may seek other allied health services in the area.

Additional COVID-19 Telehealth [MBS](#) items are now claimable through Medicare. These items include:

- GPs and other medical practitioners
- nurse practitioners
- occupational therapists
- social workers.

You **cannot** use STRC funding for:

- services that are claimable through the MBS, or
- MBS gap payments.

Some allied health professionals and clinicians are not covered under MBS Telehealth items. They can bill their services through the STRC claiming process.

You should consider and discuss with the client:

- the needs of the client
- if the services are required to restore the client's functioning
- whether critical services are available
- options available to best suit the client.

Further information

Influenza (Flu) vaccination

- All aged care workers entering clients' homes must practise good infection control to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 or influenza. We encourage aged care workers to:
 - complete the aged care and infection control training modules, and
 - have a current flu vaccination.

COVID-19 resources and information

- [COVID-19 resources](#) are available on www.health.gov.au using the search term advice on aged care during COVID-19. They include responses to [frequently asked questions](#), and information for the [general public](#) and [industry](#). The Department updates this information regularly.
- We publish a COVID-19 newsletter on our [website](#). Our newsletter lets you know when there are updates to aged care information. You can subscribe to the newsletter and aged care sector email announcements at: www.health.gov.au/using-our-websites/subscriptions/subscribe-to-aged-care-sector-announcements-and-newsletters.

Support to use the My Aged Care Provider portal

- The My Aged Care provider portal user guide provides a range of instructions:
 - Part 1 includes how to update service and waitlist availability: <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/09/my-aged-care-provider-portal-user-guide-part-1-administrator-functions.pdf>.
 - Part 2 includes how to make a support plan review request and record client notes: <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/03/my-aged-care-provider-portal-user-guide-part-2-team-leader-and-staff-member-functions.pdf>.