

Friday 26 November 2021

Dear residents, families and representatives

**Re: Changes to Visitation and Helping Hand's preparedness for positive COVID-19 cases in residential care**

With the opening of South Australia's borders on 23 November 2021, I want to take this opportunity to let you know about the plans we have in place, should a positive case of COVID-19 be reported in any of our residential homes. I also want to share with you an important decision that was made yesterday evening with the growing number of hotspots across the state.

The state government has mandated that from 6 December 2021 all visitors entering a residential care home must be fully vaccinated against COVID-19, be under 12 years of age or have an approved medical exemption in place.

**Due to the escalating risks associated with our State Borders opening the decision has been made by Helping Hand to bring this forward to 4pm today, 26 November.**

So, from 4pm today you must be fully vaccinated to enter one of our care homes. I understand that this has been a quick decision and I apologise for that. We need to ensure that we are mitigating risks where possible of COVID-19 coming into our care homes. We also recognise that the messaging can be confusing regarding travel restrictions and quarantine requirements depending on whether you are vaccinated or not. As always, there will be exceptional circumstances, including end of life, where exemptions will be made. Please speak with the site Manager to discuss any concerns you have or questions.

Thankfully, we are much better placed to respond to a COVID-19 outbreak, than we were at the beginning of this pandemic. We continue to work closely with SA Health and have taken many learnings from experiences interstate. I'm pleased to advise:

- All residential care staff have received their first and second dose of the COVID-19 vaccines, unless an approved exemption is in place as advised by SA Health.
- 87% of residents have been vaccinated and we are now commencing the roll-out of booster vaccines, across all our homes. Once booster clinics are available onsite, we will communicate these details to you. These onsite clinics are also available to residents who have changed their mind and decided to vaccinate.
- The wearing of masks continues to be mandatory for everyone on site in a care home, excluding residents
- We have minimised the option of staff working across multiple sites to reduce risk.
- Screening protocols, hand-hygiene, social distancing and SA Health's Covid-Safe Check-in QR codes are now established and accepted as daily practice.

We are also introducing a COVID-19 vaccination card for visitors. Please ensure that the home has a copy of your COVID-19 vaccination certificate (both doses), or a signed exemption form as soon as possible so that a card can be issued.

## **What to expect if there is a positive COVID-19 case in one of our homes**

### **Hospital transfer protocols established by SA Health**

SA Health have advised that they are transitioning to the next phase of 'Living with COVID' under Australia's National COVID plan. With the previously mentioned preventative strategies in place such as vaccination and improved infection prevention and control measures, it is expected that residential aged care services transition to a state where they are able to manage COVID positive residents in place with the support of external specialist advice and in-reach services provided by SA Health and the Commonwealth.

This means that residents who test positive to COVID-19 will be considered on a situation-specific basis in relation to whether they are cared for in-place or transferred to hospital.

Decisions regarding the location of the care will be made in consultation with the resident and their representatives, Helping Hand managers, SA Health Communicable diseases branch, the SA Health COVID Response Care Team (PCRS) and the GP. We have been assured by SA Health that these decisions will be person centred and will consider the safety, health and wellbeing of each resident.

We are communicating with SA Health several times a week and will keep you updated with any changes. Be assured maintaining the safety, health and well being of our residents is our priority and we remain committed to partnering with you, your representatives and your GP to ensure the right level of care is provided to meet your personalised needs, goals and preferences.

### **Helping Hand planning and simulation exercises**

Helping Hand now has a well-established COVID-19 Risk Management Plan and a Crisis Management Plan which we regularly review and update as new information becomes available. We have also seen how these plans work in action by holding real time simulation tests at each of our residential care homes.

I have personally participated in these exercises and I am confident that our staff are as prepared as they can be. We continue to carry out simulation exercises across our residential care homes.

Our workforce regularly undertakes refresher training on preparedness for Covid in Aged Care.

## Communications

In event of an outbreak, Helping Hand is committed to keeping you fully informed. I assure you that we will be transparent and timely in our communications. There will be text messages, email correspondence and as appropriate, webinars. An information hotline will be established.

Our ability to contact you as quickly as possible relies on having your current contact details. Email and mobile phone are our preferred way to reach you, so that we can reach you quickly. Please contact site administration at the earliest opportunity if they don't have your current mobile phone, email and postal address.

we are currently looking at options and strategies to ensure that you are all kept connected in the event of a lockdown. Our social media pages are still in place and we are working with our technology unit to see if we can put telephone land lines into each resident room as an interim service. We will update you as this is progressed.

## Workforce

In the event of an outbreak, staff may be required to self-isolate at very short notice. To prepare for such a situation we have a "surge workforce" strategy that includes:

- identifying staff from other Helping Hand sites and services that can support the site where the outbreak occurs
- access to casual workers (fully vaccinated) for back-filling roles
- advice from Commonwealth Department of Health and SA Health that they can provide workforce support

## Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Our staff are trained in infection control, which includes the proper use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

We have supplies of PPE at each site in the event of an outbreak and can access more from our central supply. SA Health and the Commonwealth also have stockpiles of PPE if needed.

## The first 24 hours

We have developed a comprehensive "First 24 hours outbreak plan" based on guidance from national and State health authorities. In summary, this is what you can expect:

- Crisis Management Plan activated
- residents, staff, families and volunteers notified as soon as possible
- visitor restrictions will be introduced as part of a site lockdown, except for end of life and special circumstances, which will be managed on a case-by-case basis



# Helping Hand

- essential GP and allied health visits will continue, with appropriate screening or, via telehealth
- Residents who test positive to COVID-19 will be considered on a situation-specific basis in relation to whether they are cared for in-place or transferred to hospital. Decisions regarding the location of the care will be made in consultation with the resident and their representatives, Helping Hand managers, SA Health Communicable diseases branch, the SA Health COVID Response Care Team (PCRS) and the GP. We have been assured by SA Health that these decisions will be person centred and will consider the safety, health and wellbeing of each resident.
- SA Health will complete contact tracing and advise on isolation and quarantine requirements for both staff and residents
- an information hotline will be set up for families and staffed by appropriately skilled Helping Hand personnel
- the home will remain in lockdown until advised by SA Health.

While this information can feel overwhelming, I assure you we are as prepared as we can be. No matter the circumstances, you have our commitment and assurance that we will continue to provide ongoing clinical care, personal support and service delivery for all residents.

The fact is, we are anticipating COVID-19 cases in South Australia and we will respond as needed. In the meantime, I encourage you to stay informed and keep up to date with COVID-19 developments, from a trusted and reputable source of news. If you have any questions please speak to the Residential Services Manager.

Yours sincerely

Chris Stewart  
Chief Executive Officer