

21 October 2020

Easing of restrictions in Victoria and residential aged care visits

All Victorians, and particularly Melburnians, have been carefully monitoring the daily updates given by the Premier of Victoria on the COVID-19 situation within the community and its impact on the easing of restrictions outlined in the Victorian Government's Roadmap for Reopening.

There is certainly a growing sense of optimism that the greater metropolitan Melbourne region will soon be able to move to Step 3 and be more aligned to regional Victoria.

And while there is optimism, there is also concern – particularly for aged care providers who are protecting the most vulnerable in our community – that the easing of restrictions will create a level of complacency that may cause a surge in infection rates; the risk of COVID-19 transmission into residential aged care remains very high.

At Uniting AgeWell we have taken a precautionary approach from the outset of the pandemic and will continue to do so. Our absolute priority is to maintain the health, safety and wellbeing of every resident in our care.

To safeguard residents, our ongoing preference is for virtual visits and contact via electronic means to continue as the safest form of connection between residents and families, and for the number of visits to residential care to be kept to an absolute minimum.

Where face-to-face visits are essential, our current visiting arrangements, which came into effect on Thursday 1 October 2020, remain in place; that is:

- 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.
- 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.

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- 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.

On Sunday 18 October, the Premier of Victoria announced that in regional Victoria, one household at a time can visit residents in care facilities subject to compliance with the density quotient that limits the number of persons permitted in shared or publicly accessible places.

This change has been reflected in the updated Victorian Government Care Facilities Directions (No 14). Another change introduced in the updated Directions, is that children under the age of 16 are no longer excluded from entering a care facility.

Uniting AgeWell is currently working through the logistics of the density quotient for its regional facilities in Geelong and Bendigo and will issue an update to the current visiting guidelines for these facilities over the coming days.

There is no doubt it continues to be an extremely challenging time for residents, families, friends and staff and the restrictions are difficult to bear. Yet the support, understanding and resilience of the Uniting AgeWell family has been extraordinary and we thank you most sincerely for your ongoing support and cooperation.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kinnersly', with a large, sweeping flourish underneath.

Andrew Kinnersly
Chief Executive Officer
Uniting AgeWell