



Government  
of South Australia

Hon Stephen Wade MLC  
Minister for Health and Wellbeing

MHW-A22-0456  
PREM: B1204906

Ms Jane Mussared  
Chief Executive COTA SA  
PO Box 7024  
HUTT STREET SA 5000

Dear Ms Mussared

Thank you for your letter dated 18 January 2022, to the Hon Steven Marshall MP, Premier, regarding COVID-19 outbreaks in residential aged care facilities (RACFs). As this matter falls within my portfolio responsibilities, I am responding on the Premier's behalf.

I share your concern that we need to prevent long lockdowns of RACFs, to facilitate visitors and reduce time spent alone.

The spread of COVID-19 into our residential aged care facilities is a matter of great concern. The South Australian Government has worked collaboratively with the aged care sector throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to support RACFs in preparing for and managing outbreaks. As the situation has evolved in the State, it has been important to maintain the balance between protecting vulnerable aged care residents from the risk of COVID-19 transmission, with the broader rights and wellbeing of residents and their families. SA Health continues to promote the *Industry Code for Visiting Residential Aged Care Homes during COVID-19*, and encourages RACFs to work with families to ensure continued connection with their loved one, especially during COVID-19 outbreaks.

The significant community transmission of COVID-19 this year means that RACFs are needing to act quickly to implement their responses to potential exposures. This may include restricting access to non-essential visitors when an outbreak has been identified, in line with the RACF's outbreak management plan. This response is intended to protect residents, staff and others from the risk of transmission and avoid prolonged outbreaks. Where possible, providers are encouraged to implement measures to ensure residents are not confined to their rooms for extended periods, such as cohorting COVID-positive residents together in a 'red zone' where practical, and to ensure access for essential visitors such as partners in care.

Minister for Health and Wellbeing

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*Information for Residential Aged Care Facilities – An interim guidance for COVID-19 outbreak management*, which was released by the Chief Public Health Officer on 19 January 2022, aims to provide clear recommendations to RACFs to reduce the impact of COVID on the health, wellbeing and social experiences of residents and staff. In particular, it provides authorisation for the Chief Executive of a RACF to grant work permissions for personal care and nursing staff who are close contacts, to return to work where critical workforce shortages are being experienced. This guidance seeks to ensure that residents can continue to receive high quality care and the proper functioning of the RACF can be maintained.

Thank you for your feedback and your continued support in relation to the aged care response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The wellbeing of older South Australians, including those in residential aged care facilities, is a priority of Government, including during the pandemic.

Yours sincerely



Stephen Wade

**Minister for Health and Wellbeing**

22 February 2022

cc: Hon Steven Marshall MP, Premier of South Australia