

18 January 2022

The Hon Steven Marshall  
Premier of South Australia  
Department of Premier and Cabinet  
GPO Box 2343  
ADELAIDE SA 5001

Dear Premier

On 11 January I wrote to the Director of the Office for Ageing Well and to the Chief Public Health Officer providing the feedback about the management of COVID outbreaks in aged care and in particular the interpretation and experience of what a lockdown means for residents. I expressed our concern that –

- Despite the agreement from peak bodies to the Industry Code for Visiting Residential Aged Care Homes during COVID-19 (<https://www.cota.org.au/policy/aged-care-reform/agedcarevisitors/>), we are advised that many are choosing to prohibit visitors altogether, apparently including based on SA Health advice. According to the code, a person should have access to one essential visitor even in the event of an outbreak.
- There is not a maximum number of days that a resident may be confined to their room. We get anecdotal feedback that this has now stretched beyond days to weeks even for people who are fully vaccinated, without symptoms and testing negative.
- We are not hearing instances (although I hope there are some) where family members are being helped to learn to don and doff PPE and to provide a “partners in care” approach that is part of the Visitors Code.
- That staffing is apparently so limited in some places that residents are not able to be helped to connect with family via phone or facetime.
- Non-symptomatic and non-COVID-positive people are not able to leave a facility with a COVID-19 outbreak for example to see family.
- The balance is nowhere near right between the potential for harm caused by a bewildering and lonely lockdown and the risks of COVID-19. We must, in a contemporary SA where human rights matter, regard lockdown as last resort.

We are very mindful of the extreme stress on aged care providers and workers and on health staff. We respect that there is considerable goodwill and intent. However an inordinate amount of time is being spent chasing testing, PPE, staff and in understanding rule changes. This reduces and compromises the time and innovation spent in care and in facilitating decent life outcomes for aged care residents.

It goes without saying that residents (and their families) are very anxious about COVID-19. However we should always know what we are asking of older people and there must be limits on prolonged lockdown, confinement in a room and the absence of visitors.

We welcome the SA Government's *Residential Aged Care Facilities Guidance for the management of COVID-19 outbreaks* released on 11 January. We must do more to prevent long lockdowns, to find ways to facilitate visitors and to reduce periods spent alone in a room. We cannot ask residents of aged care to do isolation tougher and for longer than we have asked any other group in South Australia.

I look forward to the leadership of your government, including in collaboration with your federal government colleagues, in getting a better balance as a matter of urgency.

Yours sincerely



**Jane Mussared**  
Chief Executive