

5 November 2021

Commissioner Mick Sherry
Electoral Commission of SA
GPO Box 646
ADELAIDE SA 5001

Dear Commissioner Sherry

Re: Electoral Commission approach in terms of supporting residents of aged care homes to vote

Thank you for your letter dated 5th October seeking feedback about the approach to be taken by the Electoral Commission in terms of supporting residents of aged care homes to vote in the March 2022 State Election. We commend the consideration and planning to support older citizens to exercise their right to vote.

We strongly encourage the first approach. A proactive investment in supporting older citizens to vote is critical. Relying upon aged care staff, brochures and instructions is not sufficient. Given the extent of vaccination and the protocols now in place in aged care homes, it is not necessary or valid to stop the visits of Electoral Commission Officials (electoral officials) to aged care homes.

Residents must be supported either to undertake a postal vote or complete a valid ballot with help provided by electoral officials attending their aged care home, complete a valid ballot.

Subject of course to prevailing public health guidelines, visits by electoral officials can be facilitated safely in much the same way that the visits of family, friends and other services are managed. Electoral officials will need to be fully vaccinated against both flu and COVID-19 and will also need to observe personal and service hygiene protocols to minimise the risk of transmission. This includes appropriate PPE and cleaning of the space and instruments used. While it will be a matter for the residents to choose whether they are visited by an official, the option must be available.

We are very concerned that without visits by electoral officials, fewer people will vote. We receive ample anecdotal feedback that suggests that, in a busy care program, voting is simply not a priority.

The visits by properly trained electoral officials is also likely to better support people for whom English is not the first language and also for those with sensory loss. Some will need extra time and resources including access to interpreters.

We cannot speak for all people living in an aged care home. However the opportunity to vote is a fundamental right including for those adults who may need extra assistance. We strongly encourage the safe visits from electoral officials to provide this assistance for the South Australian Election in March.

I am happy to discuss.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Mussared', with a large, stylized initial 'J'.

Jane Mussared
Chief Executive