



**Australian Government**

**Department of Health**

**Secretary**

Senator Katy Gallagher  
Chair – Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Via email: [covid.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:covid.sen@aph.gov.au)

Dear Senator Gallagher

Thank you for your correspondence of 8 September 2020 regarding the publication of the names and sites of aged care facilities. As communicated to the Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 (the Committee), aged care providers, in compliance with their responsibilities under the *Aged Care Act 1997* (the Act) and Quality Standards, are required to ensure residents and families are informed in an accurate and timely manner about infectious outbreaks at their facility. Communication must be clear, easy to understand and enable residents and their families to exercise choice about infectious outbreaks, quality of care and other matters that may affect their experience at a facility.

The Department of Health encourages aged care providers to have a communication plan in place to support the provision of clear, consistent and timely information to residents and their families. Failure to comply with the requirements in the Act and standards may result in regulatory action from the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission.

The Department has now commenced releasing a weekly COVID-19 data snapshot, with the first published today on 12 September 2020 on the Department of Health's website. This report provides a high level overview of the aged care COVID-19 situation nationally. It includes statistics about specific outbreak sites for facilities with more than one positive case, and contextual information about the current situation. The report will provide greater transparency for residents and their families around the current situation in aged care facilities.

While the Department remains concerned about the effect that public disclosure of this information may have on facilities, their staff and residents, it recognises this must be balanced with public interest in providing transparency for residents and families. The Department has made resources available to support facilities in the event of additional assistance being required.

The Department would prefer the Committee not publish the information provided to them in IQ20-000421, as the weekly COVID-19 aged care snapshot will be more reflective of the current outbreaks and provide more up to date information.

The weekly snapshot can be viewed at [www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/covid-19-outbreaks-in-australian-residential-aged-care-facilities](http://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/covid-19-outbreaks-in-australian-residential-aged-care-facilities)

I trust this information is of assistance and meets the needs of the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Dr Brendan Murphy

12 September 2020



**THE SENATE  
SELECT COMMITTEE ON COVID-19**

8 September 2020

Dr Brendan Murphy  
Secretary  
Department of Health

*Via email:*

Dear Dr Murphy

I refer to your correspondence dated 20 August 2020 regarding Question on Notice (ref IQ20-000421) from the committee's 4 August hearing.

The committee appreciates the information provided in answer to IQ20-000421 regarding residential aged care facilities in Victoria with five or more cases of COVID-19, which the committee has received and published.

The committee has noted your concerns regarding publication of the names and sites of aged care services with more than one and fewer than five staff or resident cases of COVID-19.

The committee welcomes your advice that residents and their families in each facility with a COVID-19 outbreak are fully advised of the situation.

The committee has considered your letter and believes that access to timely information regarding COVID-19 outbreaks in residential aged care services is in the public interest. The committee intends to publish the information you have provided including the list of those facilities with less than five cases.

Prior to the publication of this information, the committee is providing you with the opportunity to suggest any additional commentary to accompany the list of facilities that might ease your concerns with this information being made public.

For example, it may be of assistance to clarify whether facilities with more than one and fewer than five cases actually included any cases where residents have contracted COVID-19.

The committee also discussed the fact that the information you have provided is now some weeks old and requests that you review the status of COVID-19 cases in relation to each identified service and update the table accordingly, including any new facilities that should be included.

The committee asks that you respond to this request by Monday 14 September 2020 as the committee will publish the information you have already provided on Tuesday 15th September 2020.

Yours sincerely

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Senator Katy Gallagher  
Chair



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Health**

**Secretary**

Senator Katy Gallagher  
Chair - Senate Select Committee on COVID-19  
Via email:

Senator James Paterson  
Deputy Chair - Senate Select Committee on COVID-19  
Via email:

Dear Senator Gallagher and Senator Paterson

I refer to Question on Notice (ref: IQ20-000421) from the 4 August 2020 hearing, in which Senator Siewert requested a list of all the current outbreaks of COVID-19 in residential aged care facilities in Victoria, including the numbers of cases and deaths that have occurred in each.

The Department of Health (the Department) is committed to transparency. However, due to the impact public disclosure can have on an aged care provider, its staff and residents, the Department's preference, on balance, is not to disclose information about individual services. Publication of the names and sites of aged care services affected by COVID-19 has resulted in significant media attention and distress for families of residents. It distracts services from their primary response to an outbreak, diverts needed resources and in some circumstances, has contributed to a reluctance of staff to come to work, negatively impacting the capacity of the service to provide quality care. It is important to note residents and their families in each facility with a COVID-19 outbreak are advised. This is particularly of concern in relation to facilities which have very few cases of illness present or suspected.

The Department has previously taken the approach to offer the committee an in-camera briefing to disclose the names of aged care services, which was previously accepted. However, on this occasion, in response to IQ20-000421 (enclosed), the Department has provided a table of residential aged care facilities that, as at 17 August 2020, has had more than five resident or staff cases of COVID-19.



To assist the Committee, I have attached to this letter a table listing as at 17 August 2020 the Victorian residential aged care facilities that have more than one and fewer than five cases. The services that no longer have active cases are shaded in green. It is expected these services are less likely to be publicly known to have an outbreak.

The Committee may want to consider the extent to which it publishes the material and the Department would request that it publish only the services that have what is considered a more significant outbreak and are already subject of public attention for the reasons outlined above.

Around a third of the Victorian residential aged care facilities have had only a single case of COVID-19 and, of these, many had only one staff member infected, with acquisition of the case outside of the facility. Despite the fact that no transmission of COVID-19 occurred in the facility, these are still recorded as single-case outbreaks. In the Department's view, it would be inappropriate to publish the names of these facilities as they do not constitute an outbreak in the generally understood meaning of the term.

I would reiterate the offer to appear or provide information on an in-camera basis so these issues can be fully discussed.

Yours sincerely

Dr Brendan Murphy  
20 August 2020

Encl: 1 - Question on Notice ref: IQ20-000421

Cc:

The Hon Greg Hunt MP, Minister for Health,

Senator the Hon Richard Colbeck, Minister for Aged Care and Senior Australians  
and Minister for Youth and Sport,

Committee Secretary, Senate Select Committee on COVID-19, [covid.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:covid.sen@aph.gov.au)

Table 1

**Victorian residential aged care services with more than one and fewer than five staff or resident cases (38) as at 17 August 2020**

\*services with resolved cases are shaded in green.

Lynden Aged Care (Gaffney House)	Uniting AgeWell Box Hill Community Box Hill
Uniting AgeWell Kingsville	Liscombe House St Helena
St Vincent's Care Services Eltham	Vasey RSL Care Brighton
Little Sisters of the Poor Northcote	Blue Cross Riverlea Avondale Heights
Grant Lodge ACF	Riddell Gardens Aged Care Sunbury
Kyabram District Health Service	Gary Smorgon House ACF
Embracia Aged Care - Reservoir	Opal Gracedale Aged Care Facility
Highwood Court Aged Care Burwood	Bupa Aged Care Woodend
Blue Cross Baradine ACF Mooroolbark	Mercy Health Bethlehem Aged Care Bendigo
St Andrews Hostel Ardeer Aged Care	Japara the Regent Aged Care Home Mount Waverley
Homestyle Point Cook Manor Aged Care	Bupa Aged Care Greensborough
Royal Freemasons Springtime ACF	Boyne Russell House Brunswick ACF
Mercy Place Aged Care Facility Montrose	Corpus Christi Aged Care Clayton
Baptcare The Orchards Doncaster	Maculata Place Shepparton Village Aged Care
Japara The Highbury Aged Care	Holloway Aged Care
Menarock Life Aged Care Emmavale Lower Templestowe	Australian Unity Campbell Place ACF Glen Waverley
Froniditha Thalpori St Albans Aged Care	Lexington Gardens Springvale
CraigCare Moonee Ponds	Regis Aged Care Fawkner
Estia Health South Morang	Estia Aged Care Coolaroo

