

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Australian Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

7 August 2020

PDR Number: IQ20-000439

Earle Haven Inquiry for Recommendation 23

Written

Senator: Stirling Griff

Question:

Noting Recommendation 23 of the Earle Haven Inquiry in late 2019, has the Government developed protocols with State and Territory Governments for situations involving the imminent collapse of service provision in aged care facilities and if not, why not?

Answer:

The Government continues to build capacity to identify providers at risk to enable early intervention ahead of potential collapse, and has established programs to support this. The Government has enhanced its oversight of providers, including on prudential and financial performance, and through the increased regulatory (and prudential) monitoring of the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (ACQSC) since 1 January 2020.

The Government provides access to the free Business Advisory Service (BAS) to help aged care providers manage and run their business which will help them improve their operations and which also provide advice on business management and financial strategies.

The Federal Government also offers financial support to eligible providers, as appropriate, through the Business Improvement Fund (BIF) which can assist residential aged care providers to improve their business and service operations. The BIF is also available to support providers wishing to exit the market, by supporting the sale of their business to another aged care provider.

In addition, the Government has enhanced its oversight of financial performance of providers, and undertakes proactive monitoring of the prudential and financial performance of providers and works with them to assist them to manage risks. Where a provider decides to exit the market the Government works with the providers to ensure the orderly transition to a new provider or, if necessary, the orderly relocation of residents to appropriate

alternative facilities. This includes working with state and territory governments and other providers as required.

It is important to note matters referred to in the report are intended to deal with provider collapse in ordinary circumstances rather than a public health emergency such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

In relation to the COVID-19 response, in recognition of the joint responsibilities in combatting the current public health emergency, the Commonwealth is working with state and territory governments to ensure all levels of government and the sector are as prepared as possible. On 21 August 2020, National Cabinet endorsed a plan to boost aged care preparedness for a rapid emergency response to COVID-19, and a guide to the establishment of an aged care emergency response operations centre in each jurisdiction.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Australian Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

7 August 2020

PDR Number: IQ20-000441

Question Subject: First contact by the Department of Health of a COVID-19 diagnosis

Question type: Written

Senator: Stirling Griff

Question:

What is the average time between a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19 in a residential aged care facility, either staff or resident, and first contact by the Department of Health?

Answer:

The Department of Health (Department) can be notified of new COVID-19 cases in residential aged care facilities in a number of different ways. This includes emails from providers, emails from the state/territory public health unit (PHU), in the course of meetings with the PHU or emails and calls from the Victorian Aged Care Response Centre (VACRC), noting testing of staff may occur at a pathology collection centre in the community.

Under the 'First 24 hours – managing COVID-19 in a residential aged care facility' document, aged care providers are required to immediately notify the state or territory Public Health Unit (PHU), and the Commonwealth Department of Health.

Once the Department receives the notification, it is forwarded to a coordination team. The coordination team makes initial contact with a facility within an hour of receipt of notification. During this first contact with the provider, the coordination team will discuss its outbreak management response and supports available, and provide support for any immediate needs.

The case is then assigned to a dedicated case manager, who will contact the facility within 24 hours to provide ongoing support.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Australian Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Written question received 7 August 2020

PDR Number: IQ20-000473

Question Subject: Risk assessment on possible outbreaks in home care

Type of Question: Written

Senator: Rachel Siewert

Question:

What risk assessment or analysis have you done on possible outbreaks occurring through home care? What were your findings and are there significant risks to covid-19 spreading through home care?

Answer:

Successful management of community transmission of COVID-19 is critical to ensuring consumers receiving care in the home are protected from this disease.

The Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (Commission) continues to closely monitor the situation in home care and is providing support to home care service providers to manage the risks of a COVID-19 outbreak. The Commission uses its powers to ensure that providers meet their obligations with respect to the Aged Care Quality Standards, and implement all necessary steps to mitigate the risks of transmission of the virus consistent with the advice of health authorities.

The Department has responsibility to manage the situation for community based aged care service delivery and not disability care delivered in community settings.

The Department has worked with home care providers and initiated welfare checks between the Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN) and providers. This has involved OPAN making outbound calls to some people receiving home care packages who have ceased their normal services due to COVID-19. The service is based on referrals that can be made by aged care providers, health professionals or friends/family provided they have the individual's consent. Promotion of the service was undertaken together with wider communication about the Older Person's 1800 COVID Support line.

The Older Persons COVID-19 Support Line (1800 171 866) provides information and support, including referral to other services, particularly to older people less connected to the internet. The line is operated by COTA Australia, Dementia Australia, National Seniors Australia and OPAN, and complements their other services.

The Government committed an additional \$10 million over 2019-20 and 2020-21 for the Community Visitors Scheme (CVS) to further support older Australians who may be experiencing social isolation due to COVID-19 with social distancing and visiting restrictions. The additional funding aims to help CVS providers meet the increased demand of extra seniors needing friendship and companionship, or volunteers wishing to help. CVS is available to older Australians receiving or approved for Home Care Packages.

The Department issued a guide for home care providers available from:

www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020/05/coronavirus-covid-19-guide-for-home-care-providers.pdf. It provides information and guidance to providers on how to stay safe from COVID-19. It covers organisational planning, accessing personal protective equipment, handling staff to minimise risk of spread of infection, handling consumers/clients including their preparedness, emergency plans and medical considerations. It also points providers to a range of available online resources and information including the online COVID-19 training program for care workers.

Pandemic preparedness activities, plans and guidelines

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing pandemic preparedness planning activity included:

- developing and maintaining nationally agreed health sector emergency response plans, particularly the Australian Health Management Plan for Pandemic Influenza;
- maintaining awareness of international trends and new evidence for health emergency and disease specific management options, in order to inform plan reviews; and
- exercising plans and arrangements both internally and with key stakeholders to maintain familiarity and explore solutions to potential issues.

All national health plans are written to be flexible and scalable, to ensure that Australia can make the most efficient use of our resources, while causing the least burden for the health system and for our community.

Some home care workers, including administrative staff, also work in residential aged care facilities. On 13 March 2020 the Communicable Diseases Network Australia released the Guidelines for the Prevention, Control and Public Health Management of COVID-19 Outbreaks in Residential Care Facilities in Australia. These guidelines provide best practice information for the prevention and management of COVID-19 outbreaks in residential care facilities, to assist public health authorities, residential care services, healthcare workers and carers. They have been updated since the initial release.