

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Australian Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

6 May 2020

PDR Number: IQ20-000104

Question Subject: Anxiety amongst disability support workers

Type of Questions: Question in Writing

Questioner: Senator Siewert

Question:

What is the government doing to address the extreme anxiety among disability support workers about their safety in the workplace and the safety of their clients?

Answer:

- On 3 April 2020, Ministers Hunt, Roberts and Ruston announced that the Australian Government would urgently develop a response plan to focus on people with disability during the pandemic. The Management and Operational Plan for COVID-19 for People with Disability (the Plan) is part of the national response developed by the Government. The Plan is aligned to the Australian Health Sector Emergency Response Plan for Coronavirus.
- The Plan, developed and implemented under the guidance of an expert Advisory Committee including representatives from the health disability sectors, provides high level guidance on the targeted response to COVID-19 for people with disability, including their families, carers and support workers. It has been endorsed by National Cabinet.
- Under the Plan, the Department of Health has developed several strategies to ensure the safety of disability support workers in the workplace and in turn the safety of their clients:
 - the development and publication of guidance on safe workplace practices during the COVID-19 pandemic;
 - the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) to disability support workers through the National Medical Stockpile (NMS); and
 - the introduction of a Disability Information Helpline which provides information and referrals for people with disability who need help because of coronavirus. The Helpline is available to assist families, carers and support workers.

- Further updates on implementation of the Plan including outcomes of the Expert Advisory Committee meetings and resources for people with disability, families and support workers can be found at [health.gov.au](https://www.health.gov.au).
- The Government has also launched:
 - a 24x7 phone counselling service led by Beyond Blue and staffed by accredited mental health professionals to help people experiencing stress or anxiety associated with the impacts of the pandemic; and
 - COVID-19 infection control training. This 30-minute online training module covers the fundamentals of infection prevention and control for COVID-19. This training is for care workers across all health care settings, including disability (both in residential/shared care facilities or part-time carers in people's homes, including cleaners and cooks). As of 7am on 11 May 2020, 60,668 disability care workers have completed this training.