



ANMF COVID-19 RESPONSE GUIDELINE #3

ANMF Principles for Safe and Compassionate Entry into Nursing Homes

BACKGROUND

Health emergencies, such as infectious diseases outbreaks, put health and aged care systems and their ability to deliver health, social and aged care services under strain. Currently, health and aged care services around the globe, including in Australia, are being confronted with increased demand generated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The significant health risk for vulnerable older Australians from COVID-19 is of particular concern for services providing care to older people and the broader Australian community.

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) insists that protecting the health and well-being of older Australians during the COVID-19 pandemic is of the utmost importance, and notes the advice of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee in this regard.¹ The ANMF also notes that not all residential aged care providers have been able to achieve an appropriate balance between ensuring the protection of their residents from COVID-19 and ensuring residents have their social, emotional, and psychological needs met through safe, appropriate contact with their families and loved ones.

Achieving this balance requires both aged care providers and governments to provide sufficient supports and resources, the most important of which is guaranteeing that the right numbers of staff with the right level of skills are available to meet all needs of residents. **This will require every facility to have: registered nurses on duty on every shift; sufficient numbers of experienced care-workers; and, sufficient additional staff to undertake screening procedures and any other safety measures, including testing and improved infection control processes, required to enable safe visiting conditions for families and loved ones.**

ANMF PRINCIPLES FOR ENSURING SAFE and COMPASSIONATE ACCESS INTO NURSING HOMES

1. Ensure safe staffing:

- a. Retain the currently employed nurse and care-worker workforce and increase workforce capacity by increasing the hours of part-time, casual, and temporary staff.
- b. Increase the skills of currently employed nurses and care-workers as appropriate to assist in the prevention of COVID-19 infection, including infection control gap training for care workers (e.g. the national competency unit HLTINF001).
- c. Recruit nurses, some of whom have volunteered to return to the workforce to assist with the response to the COVID-19 outbreak and some of whom have increased availability because of reductions in acute hospital activity, to assist with measures, such as screening and testing and improved infection control, to facilitate safe visits by families and loved ones.
- d. Increase employment of newly graduated nurses, with appropriate support.
- e. Where appropriate, employ second and third year undergraduate nursing students in accordance with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia's (NMBA) framework for employment of students in approved programs of study.²
- f. Increase employment opportunities and work for international students of NMBA approved bachelor of nursing programs.

¹ Available at: <https://www.health.gov.au/news/australian-health-protection-principal-committee-ahppc-advice-on-residential-aged-care-facilities>

² Available at: <https://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines-Statements/COVID19-guidance.aspx>

2. Implement safe screening procedures and protections for visitors including but not limited to:

- a. Screening and assessment of potential infection risks based on current best evidence for identifying people potentially at higher risk of COVID-19 infection.
- b. Hand hygiene following evidence-based recommended practices.
- c. Limit visits to a short duration consistent with national advice of the Chief Clinical Advisor of the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission.
- d. Limits on the number of visitors in accordance with the Chief Clinical Advisor, Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission advice or local/jurisdictional recommendations.
- e. Ensure mechanisms are in place to ensure visitors and others are able to practise appropriate social and physical distancing.
- f. Facilitate other digital communications for residents and their families (e.g. video and telephone communications with family and loved ones).

3. Implement safe screening procedures and protections from COVID-19 for staff including but not limited to:

- a. Adequate supplies of appropriate types and sizes of suitable personal protective equipment (PPE) at every facility with evidence-based guidelines and training for correct use and disposal including donning and doffing procedures.
- b. Access to testing and, if necessary, paid pandemic leave for staff members who are required to self-isolate due to exposure to COVID-19.
- c. Clear and regular communication with all staff to ensure procedures and protections are understood and complied with and to allow problem identification and early intervention.

4. Provide open and transparent communication with residents, their families and loved ones regarding COVID-19 including but not limited to:

- a. Discussion of the progress of the COVID-19 outbreak and its changing impacts on the facility, with discussions customised to individual residents' needs.
- b. Provision of clear information (signage, fact sheets, etc.) on the actions the facility is taking to protect residents, visitors and staff, including guidance on reducing potential transmission of COVID-19.
- c. Continued open communication with families and loved ones with regard to individual residents' needs and how these are being met in the context of COVID-19 and current and evolving social and other restrictions.
- d. Discussion of individual residents' preferences for maintaining access and contact with their families and loved ones.
- e. Ensure residents and family members understand they have a clear internal and external escalation process to discuss concerns.

NOTE:

The ANMF acknowledges that in the event of evidence of COVID-19 infection in either residents or staff it is appropriate to strictly limit access into nursing homes in accordance with all government directives and health practices.