

Media Release

The Hon Daniel Andrews MP
Premier



Friday, 21 August 2020

WORKING TOGETHER TO PROTECT VICTORIANS WITH DISABILITIES

The Australian and Victorian Governments will enhance the coronavirus response in disability residential care through a strengthened Disability Response Centre to coordinate and manage outbreaks and keep residents safe.

Based on the experiences and lessons of the Victorian Aged Care Response Centre, this joint disability response will be based within the centre of emergency management – the State Control Centre – allowing authorities to better share information and work rapidly to respond to outbreaks.

We know there is anxiety and apprehension about coronavirus among NDIS clients, carers and support workers, with 62 active cases in disability residential services. Of these active cases, 49 are staff.

Staff working across sites present one of the highest risks for introducing the virus into disability residential services, so the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments will work together to reduce the movement of staff between sites, while supporting disability care workers.

Stage 4 restrictions put a legal obligation on service providers to restrict movement across sites as much as possible, but care arrangements typically involve care workers moving between multiple disability residential services.

The Victorian and Federal Governments will work together to support workers and providers to reduce movement between sites, so that reducing shifts doesn't mean reducing income for our vital carer workforce.

We know this is a highly casualised workforce and no one should have to choose between making the right decision to prevent the spread of coronavirus and putting dinner on the table.

A \$15 million Worker Mobility Reduction Payment scheme to compensate disability residential service providers for delivering a "one worker-two sites" cap will be established. The funding will cover the lost hours of work for hard working staff as well the higher cost of sourcing additional workers. The scheme will run up until December 2020 linked to public health workforce directions and there will be exceptions for emergency situations.

Over the coming days, governance and staffing arrangements will be finalised while the existing state-led Victorian Disability Rapid Response Group continues to manage outbreaks until the opening of the Centre next week.

The Centre will have senior officials from the National Disability Insurance Agency, NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, Commonwealth Department of Social Services, Victorian Department of Health and Services and public health leadership working together to protect Victorians with a disability.

Today's announcement builds on the Victorian Government's support to the disability sector throughout the pandemic, including:

- Establishing the initial Rapid Response Group to manage outbreaks through infection control procedures, deploying PPE, organising in-home testing and nursing support for residents.
- In addition to supports through the Commonwealth-led NDIS, the Victorian Government provided a \$17 million package of supports to ensure all Victorians with a disability get the help they need, when they need it – including increased funding for advocacy, disability health liaison officers and infection control training.
- The Victorian Government also established a COVID-19 Disability Taskforce with members across the sector to ensure the actions we take are informed by needs on the ground.

- All disability support workers are required to wear a single use surgical mask when at work at all times – this applies across the whole of Victoria and we have distributed over 545,000 single-use masks from our state stockpile to service providers.
- Workers who do not have access to sick leave who have to isolate while waiting for a test result are eligible to apply for a \$450 payment through the Victorian Government, while the Federal Government funds a \$1500 pandemic leave disaster payment for eligible Victorians directed to isolate as a confirmed case or close contact.

Quotes attributable to Premier Daniel Andrews

“Coronavirus doesn’t discriminate, but we know some Victorians are more vulnerable to this disease – that’s why we are all working together in this fight.”

“State and Federal authorities are already working side by side, but this will ensure we’re doing everything we can to protect Victorians in disability services.”

Quotes attributable to Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers Luke Donnellan

“We know that due to high levels of casualisation in the workforce, staff working across multiple sites is a risk to themselves and clients”

“This support will mean no one is worse off as we reduce mobility to protect staff and clients.”