



6 August 2021

Aged Care Visitors Code updated and calls for access rights for ‘Partners in Care’

Twelve aged care and consumer peak bodies have released an updated **Industry Code for Visiting Residential Aged Care Homes during COVID-19**, which ensures Australians living in residential aged care can safely receive visitors. The update is in line with latest AHPPC advice.

The purpose of the Code is to ensure that older Australians living in residential care have as much protection as possible from COVID while ensuring that their mental health and social connections are maintained throughout the pandemic.

The Code signatories are calling for State and Territory Health Directives to list ‘Partners in Care’, who are people who go in every day to support their loved one, as ‘essential care visitors.’ This would mean they are always permitted to visit and provide care at residential facilities during community outbreaks. Their inclusion would be better for the resident, the carer and the residential care provider but they are not currently included in all State/Territory Health Directives.

The Code highlights the importance of alternative methods of keeping people connected at times of restricted visitations when there are local COVID outbreaks. At these times providers need to allocate staff time and resources to provide frequent opportunities for residents and their loved ones to connect through window visits, phone and video calls.

In response to the more virulent Delta outbreak, the revised Code has been re-endorsed by the Australian Health Principal Protection Committee and has been updated to reflect recent advice requiring aged care workers to receive the vaccine by 17 September 2021.

Ian Yates AM, Chief Executive of Council on the Ageing (COTA) Australia, says:

“The care that ‘Partners in Care’ provide for older Australians is no less essential than that of our dedicated aged care workforce.

“Earlier in the pandemic there were concerning examples of aged care facilities banning all visitors in an attempt to keep COVID out. This has caused great distress for older Australians and their families and caused irreversible harm to many residents which no one wants to see repeated. 2020 provided a lot of valuable information about best practice behaviour which should be used to inform the most visitor friendly initiatives possible within the limitations of the State/Territory Health Directives and the guidance provided by the code.

“Of course, legitimate lockdowns are sometimes necessary. This industry code outlines how aged care providers can respond to COVID-19 outbreaks with dignity and respect, and in accordance with the most recent health advice. When there is no lockdown visiting rights must be respected.”

Patricia Sparrow, CEO of Aged and Community Services Australia, says:

"It's essential that aged care providers, families and older Australians are clear on their rights, responsibilities and the appropriate guidelines. That's the only way to ensure we put older people first and support our workers.



"Lockdowns and the pandemic have been hard on everyone, but it's no secret that older people in residential care have suffered more isolation and anxiety than most of us. The updated code will help residents and staff alike to make the most of life during a lockdown."

Older Australians and their families experiencing difficulties with visiting aged care homes can call the Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN) 1800 700 600 or visit <https://opan.com.au> to receive confidential support and advice for free from an independent advocate.

A copy of the updated code is available at www.cota.org.au/AgedCareVisitors or www.agedservices.asn.au.

The Aged Care Visitor Access Code was developed and endorsed by:

Aged Care Provider Peak Organisations	Aged Care Consumer and Carer Peak Organisations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aged & Community Services Australia • Anglicare Australia • Baptist Care Australia • Catholic Health Australia • Leading Age Services Australia • Uniting Care Australia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carers Australia • Council on the Ageing (COTA) Australia • Dementia Australia • Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia • National Seniors Australia • Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN)

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