

Illawarra Diggers COVID-19 UPDATE: 10 August 2020 - Letter to Families and Visitors

Illawarra Diggers Ongoing Closure to Visitors and General Update

Monday 10 August 2020

Dear Family Member and Visitors to Illawarra Diggers

Very sadly the COVID-19 outbreaks in Victoria are not yet under control and other states are maintaining heightened controls against the risk of outbreaks in other areas.

Aged Care homes in Victoria continue to be a serious concern as individual homes and State and Federal responses also evolve their strategies to try to arrest the spread. We are very mindful of how stressful it must be for people in Victoria with families and friends in residential aged care at present.

The reason for this letter is just to update you on our current situation. We understand that many families will be feeling anxious about the welfare of our residents. Both their physical and their mental/spiritual wellbeing. That is very understandable and we are doing everything we can to facilitate contact with our residents and also to make sure they get to any important appointments required.

Some of the additional activities and initiatives we have introduced to combat isolation lately are:

- Activity pack folders put together with find a words, puzzles, cross words etc
- Treat trolley going into each room – lollies, chocolates, biscuit etc for purchase – Fridays
- Activity trolley going to each room – CDs, DVDs, library books magazines, cards, activity packs, cards
- Woolworths online shopping for residents (fortnightly at present)
- Small group activities in each wing (rotational mornings)
- For the knitters - teach someone to knit. Buddy up to cranny squares, pom poms and fingerless gloves
- Large print books made with short stories, poets, history, national geographic pieces.
- Face time, zoom, emails.

For resident contact or any social issues please contact lifestyle@illawaradiggers.com.au;

For administrative issues relating to appointments or other matters please contact admin@illawarradiggers.com.au.

Families and friends have been very understanding and compliant with the need for us to take a lot of details prior to approving appointments away from the home. It is really important that we continue with this level of diligence.

In my last update I reported that we were increasing the checking and reporting by staff at the commencement of each shift as well as the wearing of masks in all resident and common areas. This

is continuing and we have secured another mask supplier to ensure we do not run out due to the increased needs.

A couple of weeks ago we participated in an Illawarra and Shoalhaven Health discussion on infection control in Aged Care. The area health service offered to have one of their senior clinical nurse specialists undertake an audit, specifically in relation to COVID-19 and infection control, at any residential aged care home that requested one.

We saw this as a great opportunity for another set of independent eyes to review our systems, procedures and practices and last Tuesday we were the first home to take up the offer and have an audit. The audit and subsequent report was quite comprehensive and it was reassuring that there were only a few opportunities for improvement identified. The report produced a list of recommendations which have been actioned. Some were administrative, such as plans of the home to be included in the outbreak management plan; and others were practical, such as ongoing auditing to ensure staff maintained BBE (Bare Below the Elbow) practices at all times when dealing with residents to enhance infection control.

This was a very useful service by the area health nursing staff and greatly appreciated.

We continue to receive regular updates from NSW Health in regard to hotspots and areas from where people are excluded from aged care homes. Some local government areas around Newcastle have recently been added and others, such as the Wollondilly and Wingecarribee areas of the southern highlands have been removed. Our screening questionnaires for staff and visitors are changed each time there is an update.

Visitors to Illawarra Diggers - Ongoing

1. The home remains closed to all unauthorised visitors;
2. This will be reviewed on a daily basis with updated information from various agencies to ensure the health and wellbeing of our residents and staff;
3. I will communicate with families and residents every two weeks to update everyone on any changes;
4. As soon as we are able to re-open to visitors we will communicate this to families immediately;
5. We will continue to assess each special request case on its merits so as to ensure we keep the physical and spiritual health of our residents as our primary consideration.

Resident Appointments - Ongoing

1. We will continue to facilitate residents attending external medical and health related appointments that need to be attended;
2. Families need to advise the office prior to the appointment date and make the necessary arrangements, including date, time, location and duration of the appointment and a list of names and contact details of anyone who will accompany the resident.
3. Please be aware that if the correct procedure is not followed i.e. if the appointment forms are not filled out or the residents does more than just attend the appointment without full disclosure then, for the protection of the other residents and staff, the resident may be required to remain in isolation for up to 14 days on return, which absolutely none of us wants.
4. Families accompanying residents are asked to consider wearing a mask to provide additional protection to our vulnerable residents.

Staff Procedures - Ongoing

In line with aged care facilities in the affected zones close to Wollongong and also consistent with all state run facilities and aged care homes in NSW, from Monday 3 August our staff have been required to:

1. Complete a full disclosure questionnaire when they start each shift and have their temperatures taken and recorded by another, designated staff member;
2. Wear surgical face masks in all common areas and resident private areas where there is likelihood of encountering a resident. At present staff will be permitted to remove their masks when in care stations and offices provided they are able to maintain safe distancing.

As previously advised, if you wish to deliver anything to your family, you will need to do so in office hours, Monday to Friday. The office staff will accept the delivery and ensure it gets to your family member.

Should you require further information regarding COVID-19, please refer to the Commonwealth Department of Health website:

<https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert>

We will continue to update our procedures and protocols in line with government guidelines and to communicate with our residents and our families and Illawarra Diggers community.

As always, Illawarra Diggers will continue comply with all government directives and to make informed conservative decisions to ensure the best outcome for our residents and staff.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Peter Whittall', written over a horizontal line.

Peter Whittall
CEO
Illawarra Diggers Aged and Community Care