

Department of Health and Human Services: COVID-19 support for service providers

Phil O'Meara, Executive Director, Disability and Communities Branch,
Department of Health and Human Services

4 August 2020

1. Priority actions: Outbreak response - preparation

- **COVID-19 plan for disability services sector**
- **National Management and Operational Plan for People with Disability**
- **Practice advice**
 - Hand hygiene, cough etiquette, social distancing
 - Appropriate use of Personal Protective Equipment
 - Guidance on public health directions
- **Infection control training**
- **Business continuity and preparedness training**
- **Infection Prevention and Control Outreach Team - pre-emptive visits to accommodation providers**
 - Advice and support on infection control procedures and outbreak preparedness

2. Priority actions: Outbreak response - intervention

- **Outbreak Management Protocol**
 - Details roles and responsibilities of DHHS, NDIA and NDIS Commission
- **On identification of outbreak at disability accommodation setting an Outbreak Management Team is established**
 - Co-chaired by DHHS and provider
 - Includes NDIA representative
 - Oversees and supports implementation of provider's Outbreak Management Plan
 - Facilitates emergency PPE, in-home testing, nursing surveillance support
- **NDIA has extended SIL supports for positive COVID-19 cases**
- **Disability Incident Case Manager supporting people, families and providers where suspected or confirmed case**
- **Workers can access COVID-19 Test Isolation and Worker Support Payments**

3. Disability Rapid Response Group (DRRG)

Aim:

Protect the health, safety and wellbeing of people with disability and staff in impacted service settings to contain, control and end outbreaks as quickly and safely as possible. Through preventative strategies minimise the likelihood of outbreak.

Priority areas:

- Supporting prevention and preparedness activities through coordination of visits to disability residential services and dissemination of resources and tools to the sector
- Coordination between the NDIA, NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission and Department of Social Services that articulate roles and responsibilities to support joint management of COVID-19 outbreaks in residential services
- Working with each provider to determine appropriate support response based on public health requirements and clinical advice, including assistance with infection prevention and control; PPE; workforce; communications; supporting residents at the facility
- Facilitating access to clinical services
- Assisting with any emergency disability accommodation arrangements

4. Dedicated disability support and advice to outbreak management teams

The DRRG will provide dedicated disability capability to support outbreak management throughout the course of an outbreak in a disability setting, including the allocation of a 'Disability Incident Case Manager'.

The assessment by the public health outbreak management team will guide the extent of support provided, which may be phone check in only or more intensive on site support where necessary. This may include:

- support to the service provider to implement their outbreak management plan and immediate actions as recommended by the public health team
- provision of disability specific advice to support the implementation of recommended outbreak management actions
- seeking advice from the Office of Professional Practice where residents exhibit behaviours of concern or there are restrictive intervention implications
- assistance with processes to access priority testing, in reach nursing or emergency accommodation to meet isolation requirements, if required
- work with the NDIA as necessary to ensure necessary adjustments to individuals plans for continued necessary supports
- support communication and problem solving between the service provider, the public health outbreak team and the NDIA

5. Supporting a timely response to outbreaks

- Timely information flows are critical to ensure responses to outbreaks are quickly mobilised.
- To support the DRRG to respond immediately to advice of positive cases of COVID-19 in residents and staff in disability residential services, an additional notification requirement has been put in place.
- We are asking providers to email the department directly as soon as they receive advice about a positive COVID-19 test. This includes if the advice was received directly from the employee, medical professional supporting resident or from the department's Tracing Team.
- Upon receipt of this notification, the DRRG will follow up with individual services to quickly assess priority issues and needs. The team will work closely with contact tracing and outbreak management to ensure an integrated and coordinated response.
- This additional notification process will complement advice on new cases that is being received directly from the NDIS Quality and Safety Commission to the department.
- **[WHEN THERE IS A COVID-19 POSITIVE CASE IN YOUR SERVICE PLEASE EMAIL DRRG@dhhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:DRRG@dhhs.vic.gov.au)**
- Providers of transfer services should continue to report as per existing reporting mechanisms.