

Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> April, 2020

Dear friends,

This letter follows my letter of 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2020 and is being circulated to our residents and their families and representatives, our workforce including our volunteers, our self-care residents, company members and the broader community. At the risk of bombarding you with too much information, it is intended to keep you up to date with our response to COVID-19.

### **New COVID-19 Visitor Procedures**

I wrote to you last week about the continuing need for tight visitor restrictions in aged care and noted that we have been working hard behind the scenes to improve visitor access as soon as it is safe to do so.

I participated in a conference call on Friday night involving more than 750 aged care CEOs, the Minister for Aged Care and Senior Australians Senator the Hon Richard Colbeck (Minister), and the Chief Medical Officer Professor Brendan Murphy (CMO). The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the Prime Minister's comments last week about visitors to aged care residents.

The message from the CMO was clear: "Highly restricted, highly screened visitation is what I support". The Minister said: "The PM has not given a green light for visitors."

The latest and best medical advice is clear. Rapid and widespread transmission of COVID-19 can be expected in even the most skilled aged care facility. This is because more than half the infectious people who transmit the virus will show no symptoms at the time they return a positive test result, meaning by the time even mildly symptomatic cases are detected the virus is likely to have been circulating for some time.

The most likely route of transmission in residential aged care based on evidence to date is staff. For this reason, we are carefully screening our workforce at the start of every shift. We are encouraging anyone who has even the mildest respiratory symptoms to stay away from work and have a test.

The screening our staff go through is almost identical to the screening we require of visitors. We have introduced a new COVID-19 Visitor Declaration. For convenience you can download the form from our website <https://harbison.org.au/2020/04/24/harbison-covid-19-visitor-policy-2/> where you can also read our current visitor policy.

We encourage anyone who would like to request a visit to complete the form and bring it with them to their appointment. We will keep the form and your proof of influenza vaccination on file so each time you visit you will simply have to show your ID, re-sign the declaration, and have your temperature tested and recorded. We hope this process will streamline the visitor experience. You can also complete a form at Harbison if you do not have access to a printer at home.

Please note the requirement for an up-to-date influenza vaccination is not negotiable. If you have a documented contraindication for the vaccine, please contact the Deputy Director of Nursing to discuss alternatives to a visit.

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Directors of Nursing are prioritising requests to visit for people on end-of-life pathways, people living with dementia, people who have been assessed by our clinical psychologist as suffering extreme isolation hardship, and people who enjoyed frequent visitor support immediately prior to 23 March 2020.

We are not currently able to accommodate every request for a visit. The number of visits we can allow continues to be very small, and for the time being visits are being kept very short. We intend to relax our policy in small steps based on our current risk assessment. I cannot set a timeline for this but acknowledge that from this Friday NSW has made a small change to restrictions to allow visits of no more than two adults between households.

Appointments for visits will generally be restricted to the afternoon for the time being, so we can support virtual visits in the mornings. We have engaged a temporary workforce of care support staff who are working closely with volunteers to make it all happen, and feedback so far about this new team has been very encouraging.

I note that the Government, who funds care wages, has provided NIL support to cover the additional costs of screening and supervising visitors, and the Minister demonstrated all his political skills on Friday night to ensure this issue went through to the keeper.

We encourage you to send care packages, cards, letters, emails etc to residents and explore the options for frequent virtual contact by phone or video. If you have had a negative experience so far, I apologise and urge you to try again because we are constantly adding resources and refining our methods based on experience. We hope to get very good at this.

Thank you to everyone who has provided us with feedback on this issue. The overwhelming majority support ongoing highly precautionary measures and understand the specific risks to vulnerable populations of older people. Please continue to provide us with your feedback so we can take your views into account as we make our decisions.

The health and safety of our residents during a declared public health emergency will continue to be our overriding priority. The guiding principle continues to be to avoid unnecessary visits and keep essential visits very short.

### **ANZAC Day 2020**

Despite the lack of ceremony this year, ANZAC Day 2020 was a strangely beautiful day at Harbison. Greg Howard, a master from the music department at Sydney Grammar School, kindly played the last post at each home on Saturday morning. Small numbers of residents, staff and volunteers found very personal and meaningful ways to honour the ANZACs.

The ANZAC spirit has been very evident in our community this year, first with the bushfires and floods, and now the pandemic. I am proud to be part of a community of generous, compassionate, resilient and resourceful people. As during the fires, Harbison has been working closely with others: health authorities, community organisations, local and regional aged care services, the local hospital, and local general practitioners. We are all in this together.

## **COVIDSafe App**

Harbison supports and promotes use of the new COVIDSafe app which is available from the Apple App Store and Google Play. The app uses Bluetooth to handshake with other phones running the app and record when you are closer than 1.5m for more than 15 minutes, on a rolling 21-day basis. The app does not send any data out. The data is encrypted and stored on your phone and automatically deleted after 21 days.

If you are using the app and become ill, the contact tracing teams from the Department of Health will ask you to upload the data so they can quickly contact the phone numbers that have been in close contact with you in the last 21 days. This quickens the process of informing people they need to self-isolate and get a test, which in turn slows the spread of infection and saves lives.

You can register the app with a pseudonym if you are worried about privacy. The contact tracing teams will still trace your contacts if you do not use the app, but obviously the process will be slower and less accurate than when app data is available.

We urge you to consider using the app. In the event of an outbreak at Harbison, it may make all the difference in containing the virus and minimising the number of affected people. More information is available at <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/covidsafe-app>

## **Refurbished kitchen at Burradoo**

Last year we decided the time had come to repair the ageing floor in our kitchen at Burradoo, which was on the verge of becoming a safety issue. Replacing a kitchen floor is not a simple exercise. It requires stripping out the entire kitchen so the floor can be removed.

With hindsight a major kitchen renovation is not ideal during a pandemic. Unfortunately, the work began before the pandemic was declared. Once we began excavating the old floor it became clear that the necessary repairs were more extensive than expected. This caused a delay to the program, for which we apologise.

Our catering partners at CaterCare worked very hard using temporary kitchen facilities while the work was done. In my view they did a great job, and I am grateful to them for showing great respect and patience in the face of understandable frustration. I am also grateful to our Residential Services Manager, Danny Turner, for thoroughly solving a problem that defeated his predecessors.

Thank you to everyone at Burradoo for your understanding. The refurbished kitchen will allow us to provide an improved meal experience for years to come.

## **Expectations in an outbreak**

Our COVID-19 plan is based on three principles: prevention, early identification, and response.

While our focus is on prevention, we are well advanced in planning and refining our response in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak. I would like you to be aware of the basic elements of our plan, so you know what to expect.

Our plan is based on the guidelines developed by the Communicable Diseases Network Australia (CDNA). The CDNA guidelines are a scaled-up version of the guidelines to manage an outbreak of influenza.

As soon as an outbreak is declared we will activate our Outbreak Management Team, notify the relevant GP, isolate the unwell resident(s), and implement contact and droplet precautions (masks, gloves, gowns etc).

Signs will be posted to warn people about the outbreak, including signs outside infected residents' rooms. Our cleaning team will immediately increase the frequency of cleaning. We will activate our C-19 Strike Team to provide dedicated care for the infected resident(s).

We will notify the public health authorities, every GP with a patient at Harbison, every member of our workforce, and the families and representatives of our residents.

Throughout an outbreak staff and residents will be restricted to specific areas, to minimise movement throughout the facilities. Residents may be confined to their rooms. All social activities and non-essential visits will be cancelled.

The level of care and service we deliver to healthy residents in an outbreak will be determined by the number of qualified staff we have available. We plan for up to 30% of our workforce to be unavailable in an outbreak. Normal service should not be expected.

The local hospital will follow a non-transfer strategy in an outbreak. The hospital physician will be responsible for deciding whether to transfer an unwell resident to hospital, in consultation with the relevant GP. Harbison is not authorised to make that decision.

During an outbreak complaints and media enquiries will be escalated to me.

In an outbreak the goal is to provide supportive care for unwell residents and minimise the transmission of the virus. To paraphrase Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand, we believe that decisive action - going hard and going early - will give us the very best chance to stamp out the virus and prevent a wave of devastation from crashing through our facilities.

Obviously, we are working constantly to avoid an outbreak. A deep sense of anti-climax would be a great outcome.

#### **Rapid access services at Bowral and District Hospital**

For awareness, our local hospital has introduced rapid access services for paediatric, surgical and medical care.

This service can be activated by your GP to minimise waiting times in the emergency department and may reduce the need to visit the hospital.

The hospital may also provide support for our residents at Harbison without the need to transfer to the hospital. This is known as "hospital in the home".

#### **Thank you to Matthew Burke and the Highlands Storm Rugby League Club, and welcome to our amazing new recruits**

To finish on a positive, I would like to thank Matt Burke of local firm Matthew Burke Electrical and the members of the Highlands Storm for a very generous donation to Harbison. The funds will be used by Stephanie Haines – a master cake maker who is a new recruit to our catering team – to provide residents and staff with treats and birthday cakes to lift morale during these challenging times.

As you know, we have been recruiting a temporary care support team as part of our pandemic response. Many of these new positions have been filled by people who have been stood down from their normal jobs.

We are very pleased to be able to provide locals with an opportunity for employment and very lucky to have so many wonderful and highly skilled people available to support our residents through the pandemic. I hope you enjoy your time at Harbison and may even consider a permanent future in aged care.

Welcome to Stephanie and the other new recruits, and thanks to Matt and the Highlands Storm for thinking of us with their fundraising.

Thank you for reading this letter. I hope you find the information useful and will provide me with feedback to help us understand your needs and preferences. As I have stated previously, I am proud to lead such a dedicated and resilient team, and any frustration or disappointment about our current restrictions should be directed to me, not them.

I am quietly confident that our collective efforts to slow the spread of the virus are working, and we can look forward to a more normal life in the foreseeable future. Hang in there, stay safe, and be patient.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Cochran', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David Cochran  
**Chief Executive Officer**