



Thursday 23rd December, 2021

Dear friends,

This letter provides a brief update to my letter dated 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2021. For those of you who are counting this is the 39<sup>th</sup> letter of the year, but I hope it will be the last.

### **Rapid antigen testing for returning residents**

Public health advice has updated today to require that residents who leave the home must have a rapid antigen test (RAT) on days 2, 4, and 7 after they return. We will apply these new requirements retrospectively to residents returning from leave or outings on and from Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2021 i.e., if you returned yesterday or today you will be tested tomorrow or the next day.

If a returning resident becomes symptomatic, they will be required to isolate pending a PCR test, regardless of their RAT result.

### **Rapid antigen testing for visitors**

The Government has today announced an intention to fund RAT for residential aged care from "early 2022". Details are yet to be announced. Our \$10 fee will continue to apply until the Government-funded kits become available.

Thank you to our visitors this week who have collaborated so patiently with staff to put the new RAT requirements into practice. I have received some concerned feedback from people who do not think we should be charging a fee to partially cover the cost of the test, but the current Government policy announced on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2021 is: "It is expected that visitors will provide their own RATs to assist with the management of infection". In other words, visitors are expected to bear their own costs for RAT.

If you prefer, you can supply your own RAT and self-test under observation of staff when you arrive, to ensure the result is valid. However, feedback suggests that \$10 is good value and very convenient, and our test kits are one of only five types approved for use in Australia with the highest effectiveness rating.

The other way to avoid the fee is to have a PCR test within 24-hours of your visit but testing times have blown out and are unpredictable and the waiting time for PCR tests is reportedly severe. The final option is to wait for Government-funded kits to become available in the new year.

### **Visitor limits**

It is vital that everyone respects the current visitor limit of 2-fully-vaccinated-visitors-per-resident-per-day plus 2 supervised children under 12.

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Like all providers, we have record numbers of staff furloughed and there is no available workforce over Christmas. Screening visitors takes available staff away from care, so we are working hard to balance the needs of everyone to maintain access throughout the festive period. This may require some trade offs in terms of service but will not compromise care.

The updated health advice today endorses a reduction to 1-fully-vaccinated-visitor-per-resident-per-day with no children if necessary. If the burden on staff means a risk to care, then we will be forced to further restrict visitors, but at this stage we believe that we can maintain the current limit with your cooperation.

### **Rapid antigen testing for staff**

We have begun distributing test kits to staff to use at home on the day of and prior to their shift. Staff are required to maintain a record of their tests and upload it to Altura after the 20<sup>th</sup> test. Staff are required to complete mandatory training on the proper RAT procedure, prior to their first RAT.

We are arguably entering the most dangerous phase of the pandemic for residential aged care. Although it is encouraging to see that Pfizer's anti-viral medication has been approved in the USA, production at scale is at least 9-months away. The case numbers in NSW reflect the abandonment of rules in favour of guidance, and the Prime Minister's sunscreen analogy is unhelpful (if you don't slip, slop, slap, the person next to use doesn't get sunburnt). Please consider your choices carefully this Christmas and help us keep everyone at Harbison safe while maintaining precious contact with loved ones.

With fingers crossed that we won't need letter #40 this year, have a safe and happy Christmas and take a moment to reflect on all the good things we achieved together in 2021.

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**