



Friday 31st December 2021

Dear friends,

This letter follows my letter yesterday, 30th December 2021, and provides a general update on the developing COVID-19 situation at Harbison. We are communicating directly with families of any unwell residents.

Harbison Burradoo is declared an outbreak site

We have this afternoon declared a COVID-19 outbreak at Burradoo because a second member of our team has been confirmed as a case. Currently there are no resident cases.

As you know, we activated our Outbreak Management Plan at Burradoo last Tuesday, when we first suspected an outbreak. This means that our staff have been working in full PPE for the past four days to minimise the risk of further transmission.

Residents are confined to their rooms where possible, and communal activity is suspended. Outdoor activity is encouraged where possible withing a wing, and windows must be opened to maximise ventilation.

The NSW Health COVID-19 testing system has been overwhelmed by travel-related testing, which has two implications for how we manage this outbreak. First, there will be extended delays in obtaining test results. Second, it is not possible to test residents and staff on a large scale.

Therefore, we will rely on daily rapid antigen tests of residents and if any PCR testing capacity is available it will be prioritised for residents who are symptomatic or test positive to a rapid antigen test. Fortunately, Harbison invested in rapid antigen tests when they first became available, and we are starting from a strong position in this regard.

Burradoo residents will be tested daily until further notice with the aim of early detection of any transmission. Staff will continue to test themselves before each shift, as per the precautions activated prior to Christmas.

Harbison Moss Vale remains a suspected outbreak site

As you know, we activated the Outbreak Management Plan at Moss Vale last Wednesday, when we first suspected an outbreak. We have a single confirmed staff case and no resident cases. However, like Burradoo, we have identified exposure risk for staff and residents linked to Christmas family gatherings. We will maintain our precautions at Moss Vale pending further confirmation from delayed PCR testing.

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Outbreak Management Team

Today, our Outbreak Management Team met with public health authorities to risk assess our situation. The meeting was positive. This group will meet again on Sunday 2nd January 2022 to reassess. We are among many residential aged care services going through this process, and so far, evidence suggests that high vaccination rates and careful infection prevention and control are resulting in very low rates of illness or death.

Harbison enjoys very high rates of vaccination among residents, including high rates of third dose vaccination. As you know, all staff are fully vaccinated with two doses and are strongly recommended to have their third dose as soon as they are eligible.

I have been very impressed with the leadership and care teams this week. It is one thing to plan and train and another thing entirely to respond to an actual outbreak for the first time. Doing it over Christmas-New Year adds layers of additional problems, but you wouldn't know it. Our team has been calm, collaborative, and professional and I am hopeful that our response will be very effective. My thanks to everyone who has returned from leave or adjusted their hours to care for our residents.

PPE

We estimate that we have enough PPE for the immediate future, and more is being requisitioned. Like the testing system, we anticipate the PPE supply chain may also be under pressure, but careful planning means we start from a strong position. We ask staff to carefully conserve their PPE in accordance with their training e.g., P2 masks are for 8-hour continuous use unless donning and doffing is required between compartments.

RAT

To preserve our resources, we are suspending sales of rapid antigen tests until our next delivery arrives. We apologise for the delay, but we will fulfil orders as soon as possible. We did not expect such a large response to the offer, and we hope you have found the service convenient and cost effective.

Surgical masks for residents

Yesterday, I noted that any resident who wishes to wear a surgical mask will be provided with masks on request.

To explain further, one of the most effective ways to lower the risk of transmission is the use of PPE, like masks. Our staff are wearing special masks and eye protection as part of their PPE, but to minimise the risk completely then all parties to an interaction should be protected.

Therefore, if a resident chooses to wear a surgical mask during an interaction, we will achieve the safest possible outcome.

Obviously, not all residents can wear a mask, and some prefer not to. We are simply pointing out the option for your consideration.

Rumours & complaints

It is not just unhelpful at times like this to spread rumours, it is irresponsible, unkind, and (usually) ignorant.

Our focus is the safety and health of our residents and workforce. The entire organisation, from the Board down, is committed to quality and safety.

Rumours tend to trigger unreasonable and unfounded complaints which still need to be managed in accordance with our Quality Standards. This adds to the workload at a time when we all have more than enough work, it can undermine morale, and can be a distraction from our mission to keep everyone at Harbison safe.

If you have a concern, please use our feedback and complaints system to raise it. Please do not post it on social media unless you are not really interested in improvement.

You can provide feedback using the link on our website <https://harbison.org.au/contact-harbisoncare/complaints/> or by phone, email, or using the feedback forms which staff can provide on request.

While anonymous complaints are respected, we appreciate the opportunity to respond. If something has gone wrong, we will make changes to improve the outcome in the future and invite you to be part of the process.

If you are not satisfied with our response, then you can escalate the issue to an advocacy service like OPAN <https://opan.org.au/> or the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission <https://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/>

Next steps

We remain closed to visitors except at end-of-life or on compassionate grounds if a single visitor has been providing regular, frequent care to a resident e.g., living with dementia. In some cases, these exceptions may need to be approved by the public health unit e.g., if the visit is to an outbreak site. There may be delays and inconveniences involved, but we will work with you to achieve the best outcome.

We are closely monitoring the situation and will confer with public health authorities on Sunday. We are hopeful that by Tuesday we will have more certainty and aim to release residents from lockdown as soon as possible. At Burradoo, this will require a declaration that the outbreak is over which may take some time.

Please be mindful that the public health system is under extreme pressure. Everything is taking longer than planned because of the scale and speed of transmission in the community. Everyone in the system is working hard to help, but expectations must be realistic.

We will contact families of any unwell residents directly and immediately and are working to activate virtual visits as soon as possible.

Our thoughts are with the members of our workforce who are unwell or caring for members of their families who are unwell.

Happy New Year

Please practice care during the New Year period. COVID-19 is preventable.

I take this opportunity to wish everyone a Happy 2022 and thank the Harbison team for really stepping up over a difficult Christmas at the end of another uncertain year. Your calmness, professionalism, collaboration, and kindness are a credit to you all.

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