

Warrigal

Inspiring communities
for older people

From the desk of
**Executive
Operations**



10 September 2021

Dear resident representatives and relatives

The past week has seen the trend continue with record numbers of positive cases in both NSW and the ACT. Vaccination rates have also increased substantially over the past week, with NSW now having 76.4% of the eligible population receiving their first dose of the vaccine, and 43.6% having now received both doses. In the ACT, the total percentage that have received both doses is higher at 49%, while over the weekend they should achieve 75% of the eligible population having received their first dose. There have been some regional areas in NSW where restrictions will be eased from this weekend, but these are areas where there have been no positive cases for at least 14 days. Unfortunately, this does not include any of the locations where Warrigal has a Care Home, and as a result, all of the areas where we operate remain in lockdown.

There was confirmation this week that the stay at home orders in NSW will be lifted for adults from the Monday after NSW passes the 70 percent double vaccination target. This is subject to change if circumstances change drastically, or if cases in a designated area remain too high. Only fully vaccinated people and those with medical exemptions will have access to the easing of restrictions under the proposed roadmap.

While the roadmap focused on gatherings in a private home, public spaces and venues including hospitality and retail, the risk within an aged care home where vulnerable people live is significant. Once restrictions are eased within the community, we have commenced preparing a policy on who can enter a home, including staff, visitors, volunteers and contractors. In the past week, the number of aged care homes in NSW experiencing an outbreak has increased from 24 to 47, and after next Friday when it will be compulsory for staff to have received their first dose of the vaccine, the risk of COVID coming into a Care Home is predominantly with visitors.

The Public Health Orders do not require maintenance contractors to be vaccinated, however, Warrigal has taken the position that they must be vaccinated to come into one of our homes, which means that unvaccinated visitors present the highest risk of COVID entering the home, and while we respect the choice of individuals to be vaccinated, initially these visits will need to be outdoors, once restrictions are eased.

Unfortunately COVID is not going away at any time in the foreseeable future, and while we continually adapt our policies and processes to manage the risk, and consistently update our Outbreak Management Plans in preparation of an outbreak, you can support Warrigal and all of the residents who live in a care home by being vaccinated.

COVID-19 Cases – NSW

In the past week, the number of positive cases continues to increase, with 9,954 cases, an increase of 1,477 from the previous week where there were 8,477 cases. The average number of cases is 1,422 a day. There are now 1,156 people in hospital with 207 in Intensive Care, and 89 on ventilators. The number of hospital admissions continues to grow, and as I indicated last week, this is impacting on hospitals outside of the Greater Sydney CBD who are establishing COVID wards, as the peak number of admissions is not anticipated for a few weeks. We continue to meet regularly with the respective Health Districts and update our plans based on the feedback and changes in the community.

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COVID-19 Cases – ACT

The number of cases in the ACT linked to this outbreak is now 463, and 78% of these cases have not been vaccinated. There are now 238 active cases with 225 people having now recovered.

There were 24 cases in the past 24 hours, and fortunately 15 of these cases were in quarantine for the entire infectious period. There are currently 15 patients in ACT hospitals, including 4 in Intensive Care and 1 requiring ventilation.

Infection Control

An important part of our planning has been appointing an Infection Protection and Control person in each home who was required to complete a training course. In order to strengthen this area, we are in the process of recruiting an Infection Protection and Control Coordinator who will be part of our Compliance Team and drive this across Warrigal.

Rapid Antigen Testing

As advised in a previous update, Warrigal will be trialling the use of Rapid Antigen Testing at our Queanbeyan Residential Care Home. The trial will last two weeks from 20 September to 3 October 2021; and will be part of the home's workplace screening initiatives. Rapid antigen testing is quick, easy and safe. It involves a nasal swab (using a far less invasive cotton instrument than a standard COVID-19 test) that is then placed into a chemical solution and tested, with results available within 10-15 minutes. For staff and contractors, screening will be undertaken at the start each shift for the two week period. For family and visitors, the test is to be taken upon arrival for each visit.

Rapid antigen tests are used to potentially identify positive cases to help reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus and prevent outbreaks.

Not everyone who has COVID-19 shows symptoms. People without symptoms may unwittingly transmit the virus. This is particularly of concern with the COVID-19 Delta variant which transmits much more readily and with a greater health impact than previous variants. Rapid antigen testing provides an extra layer of protection against the spread of the virus and assists other protocols that are already in place. These include the wearing of face masks, physical distancing, hand washing/hand sanitisation, vaccination, and any health rules that may be in place at that time.

Visitor Restrictions

There are still no changes to the current restrictions that are in place for visitors. At the moment every Warrigal Residential Care Home is located within an area that is in lockdown, and social visits are not permitted. We are following the guidelines from NSW and ACT Health; and to be clear on these restrictions, visits are limited for essential care purposes to one visit per resident per week unless it is for end of life.

Vaccinations

Warrigal, as a service provider, is responsible for ensuring that vaccinations have been provided to any worker that we employ, volunteers, and ancillary staff. We have 1,322 staff working in our residential aged care homes, and as at 9 September, there are 96 staff members that have not yet been vaccinated. This number includes staff that are currently on long term leave, including maternity leave, and while they will need to be vaccinated prior to returning, this can be undertaken after the 17 September deadline.

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There are four more in-house clinics organised for next week to capture the majority of the staff that need to be vaccinated by the deadline; however, there are a small number of staff that have advised they will not be getting the vaccination which is disappointing, and while their choice is respected, they will not be able to continue to work in a residential care home.

Your feedback is always welcome and is important for us if we are going to establish trust and provide a quality service. There are many ways that you can provide this feedback including contacting your local management team, calling 1800 927 744 or by emailing us at warrigal@warrigal.com.au.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'CS' or similar initials.

Craig Smith
Executive Leader – Service Integrated Communities