

An important message on Whiddon's response to COVID-19

The message below is taken from the video message prepared by Whiddon CEO Chris Mamarelis, available on our website and Facebook page



At this time, we are all thinking about you at Whiddon and I'm sure that many of you are concerned about families and loved ones that you have entrusted us to care for, during what is now a pretty challenging time for everyone.

So, to assist, I am providing you with this update to let you know some of the things we are doing at our homes and services, right now in response to COVID-19

Obviously, the ongoing threat of COVID-19 and the response we are seeing from government, organisations such as ours and the community, impacts every one of us.

Aged care is no different and the reality is that we have even more responsibility right now. We are trying our very best to respond and communicate to you as quickly as possible, however the environment changes daily, so at times our response can fall behind our actions and I apologise when this occurs.

We do have an established communication protocol though, and throughout this period you will hear from us by text, phone, mail and online. Importantly though, and for those who can, please keep a close eye on our web site (whiddon.com.au) and social media (facebook.com/WhiddonCare) as this is the quickest way we can get our messages across on a large scale.

With this said, we have had to initiate a lot of change in a short period of time, so the following is a current overview of our response to COVID-19.

Firstly, as an organisation it's important to understand that we are directly in touch with industry bodies, health services and government, so that we can receive the most up to date information and translate it into action quickly. Further to this, we have established our internal emergency response

structure and are dedicating resources, systems and people to provide focussed support across the group, to ensure every action is designed to protect residents, clients and our team to the best of our ability

Supporting this, it's also important to note that we have a large, skilled and committed team who are well resourced and supported by a very experienced Board, with a team that is working day and night at present, for everyone in the Whiddon family and that covers our largest campus in Glenfield to our smallest homes in Bourke and Walgett.

Visiting Residents

In terms of visiting residents and loved ones, the government has provided an initial set of rules that have really restricted visitations to all aged care homes. In addition to this and like many other aged care providers, Whiddon have gone a step further and that is to basically put a hold on all visitations unless there are exceptional circumstances – such as on compassionate grounds.

This came into force on Friday 20 March and is in place for two weeks and will be reviewed again prior to 3 April so we can decide on how to manage next steps. Decisions relating to compassionate visits are made by local managers and are made at the discretion of our Directors of Care who with their leadership teams, understand our families and our residents best.

I must say that this decision to restrict visitations has been the hardest one of all to make. As you may know, Whiddon was one of the first organisations to introduce a relationship based model of care and bring in a resident management tool so that we can assess resident and client wellbeing, so these measures go against many of our core principals. They do however offer very strict infection control

which is vital given how vulnerable our residents are, combined with the need to protect the wonderful people providing care services daily.

It's important to note the statistics tell us that the mortality rate among our elders, people over 80 are the most severely impacted at approximately 15%, so I genuinely hope you understand our motivation for the steps we have taken

As mentioned, we will continue to review this measure over the coming weeks and will look to relax these rules as soon as the environment allows us to, however it's possible that they will stay in place for an extended period of time, and if this occurs its likely we will need to look at how we can facilitate safe visits from families and loved ones.

Having said this, obviously restricting visitations can really impact our residents who may feel disconnected and even isolated during this period. To try and combat this I have asked our teams to increase our activities and leisure officer hours, we have also modified some activities to cater for the new restrictions and we are in the process of deploying new software and technology to assist families to connect with their loved ones. We are also engaging with a number of third parties, such as schools, to initiate new programs and initiatives, that allow residents and the community to connect and we will tell you more about these once we are ready to go.

Personal protective equipment

In terms of our employees, we have provided additional online training regarding infection control and the COVID-19 virus, we also have a number of measure in place to provide support for the team and are looking at how we can expand this further.

COVID-19 has also led to a huge industry wide shortage in the supply of personal protective equipment (PPE). PPE is so important as it allows our team to look after our residents and clients while keeping them safe.

It is important to note thought that there are strict guidelines regarding the use of PPE and we need to manage stock in line with these guidelines in order to preserve our supplies. After a lot of hard work,

we are now starting to get some traction with suppliers and with support from government are hopeful that our stocks of PPE will now begin to replenish, covering items such as masks, gloves and sanitizer.

Community Care/In Home Care

In terms of our in-home Community care service, we are continuing to look after all of our clients at home, across New South Wales and Queensland. Of course we have had to increase infection control measures, including screening of our all team members visiting clients homes, along with other procedures, so it's very important to understand that we are here for you during this difficult period. If you have any specific requests, that will give you greater comfort during this period, we can tailor services to meet your needs to give you peace of mind.

Retirement Villages

To all of our village residents, we are extending whatever additional support we can offer to you and ask that you reach out through our normal channels should you need anything at all. Both home care clients and village residents can expect to hear from us more often than usual as we simply want to see how you are.

Through this short statement we cannot cover all of our measures in detail, however I hope I have been able to provide a better understanding of some of the measures we have taken and our motivation for doing so. We have over 2,000 precious lives in our hands and we are doing everything we can to protect them from this horrible virus.

Importantly, please remember to show your appreciation for the people working in age care. Whoever they are, within any organisation, any way you can. Whether they are a nurse, an assistant in care, in hospitality services or providing maintenance. **The people who do this work are our heroes, are absolutely amazing people and now more than ever they need to know we are there behind them cheering them on.**

Chris Mamarelis
Chief Executive Officer

Whiddon

Award-winning care that connects,
inspires and enriches lives every day.