

ANMF COVID-19 Newsflash:

Huon Regional Care

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, Tasmanian Branch (ANMF) wrote to Huon Regional Care management to seek an update in relation to your facility and their response to the current Omicron COVID-19 situation in Tasmania, including the impact this is having on you and the subsequent care of residents. Specifically, the ANMF has asked of your facility the following questions *in italics*, and the response from your employer are in **bold**.

If the answers are contradictory to what you are experiencing, please advise the ANMF via our member support team so we can initiate further communication with the facility.

1. *Could you please provide details on the strategies implemented to reduce transmission of the Omicron strain in your facility/facilities? Or alternatively, please feel free to provide a copy of your outbreak management plan.*

Huon Regional Care has an Outbreak Management Plan which has been reviewed against the Aged Care Emergency Outbreak criteria, this also contains the first 24-hour guidelines to follow in an outbreak, which is available for all staff in designated areas throughout the facility. Meetings are held monthly with the Aged Care Emergency Operations Centre and tailored workshops were held prior to the Tasmanian border opening. The Huon Regional Care Infection Control committee meets monthly, and the COVID-19 pandemic is discussed at the weekly Executive Managers meeting and at the bi monthly Clinical Governance board committee and the Huon Eldercare Limited board meetings. Updates for staff, residents and board members are provided regularly, or when requested. Regular PPE stocktakes are undertaken, there are Infection Control leads at each facility and the staff training for the last 2-3 years has contained a specific section on COVID-19, which is also highlighted during inductions. Mandatory annual training and HERC training is provided as scheduled.

2. *Can you confirm that you have sufficient PPE and hand sanitiser to allow staff, and residents, to be kept safe ... (particularly if there were to be an outbreak at your facility)?*

There is sufficient PPE in stock and adequate supply chains in place, as you are aware stocks are low across the country due to demand and compromised staff unable to work. Ordering has commenced from the Department of Health resources and Huon

Regional Care is in close contact with the dedicated liaison officer from the Commonwealth Department of Health.

3. *Have staffing been fit tested for N95 masks? If no, when is this to occur and what are the interim safety measures that will be established while staff are waiting for fit testing?*
Staff have completed online training for N95 fit testing. Facility Managers at the Dover and Nubeena sites (who are Registered Nurses) have provided additional training to the teams and the Franklin staff have been provided with this training by the Clinical Care Manager.
4. *What payments or access to special leave will be granted for staff who are required to isolate pending getting access to a COVID test and obtaining the subsequent result? Noting that access to testing is now significantly delayed.*
Staff have been advised that they can readily access their leave entitlements if they are unable to attend work due to a positive result or need to isolate. Information has been relayed to staff regarding the Pandemic Isolation Assistance Grants and advised of how this may be accessed if their circumstances require isolation and they do not qualify for any leave entitlements. As always, individuals will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.
5. *In the instance that staff are required to receive a third COVID booster dose, will there be access to additional special paid leave/time to attend a booster appointment? If a staff member has an adverse reaction to the booster, will paid leave cover this time as well?*
Confirmation was received on 12 January 2022 that boosters are not mandatory for aged care workers, however, as an organisation this practice is strongly encouraged and have held booster clinics within the facilities in preparation. Staff are able to attend booster vaccination appointments, as they were for the initial appointments. Leave entitlements are available, with individuals reviewed on a case-by-case basis.
6. *Are there any additional leave (over and above personal leave) arrangements available to staff who, not being unwell themselves, need to self-isolate or care for someone (e.g., child) that will be provided?*
This will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.
7. *Will you be providing Rapid Antigen Testing for staff members? If so, what will the process be for access to these tests?*
Testing will be provided as per guidelines. Currently an order has been placed as per State Department of Health, Aged Care Emergency Operations Centre, and Commonwealth protocols. As you are aware it is difficult to obtain adequate numbers of RAT tests, but close liaison with the Commonwealth Department of Health is part of

our daily communications and they aware of the situation. Adequate tests were ordered as per the directions, however, advice to date is that delays over and above the quoted 4-5 days for delivery are likely.

8. *Are you willing to commit to presumptive workers compensation if a staff member becomes unwell, after a workplace exposure, with COVID-19?*
Should a workplace exposure take place and an employee becomes unwell, they will be entitled to make a claim through the Workers Compensation system. If absences are of a short period of time, it would be an option to look at paying those staff members over their entitlements, if the employee was to agree.
9. *If a number of staff become unwell (or are not unwell but are required to isolate pending test results) with COVID-19, what plan is in existence to maintain safe staffing levels?*
Staffing levels have been reviewed and discussed with the Aged Care Emergency Operations Centre and ACSA, with regard to providing a surge workforce. Non-essential non clinical staff have been directed to work remotely to mitigate the risk of exposure coming into the facilities. Twelve-hour shifts have been considered and will be implemented in the case of a full outbreak, however, at this stage this is a contingency plan. In September 2021, a willingness to work survey to ascertain how many staff would be willing to work in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak was undertaken. Responses were excellent with only a handful staff indicating that due to health or family reasons they would not be able to work but would be willing to be redeployed to other areas of the business.
10. *Are you employing additional administration staff to deal with access and entry to your facility and any extra record keeping that is required?*
Additional staff have been trained over the previous months to prepare for the increased record keeping requirements. The majority of the COVID-19 related record keeping has been undertaken by the People and Culture Team, who will continue to assist and relieve the pressures that the additional workload brings. The WHS Officer works closely with administrative and clinical staff by providing support and guidance.
11. *Could you please provide a copy of your staffing strategy, and any staffing contingency plans?*
As above.

Further, as the aged care sector is a Commonwealth responsibility the ANMF Federal Acting Secretary Lori-Ann Sharp will be meeting with the Commonwealth to raise concerns and call for action to:

1. Address the poor booster shot roll out in aged care
2. Ensure that there is sufficient PPE in all aged care facilities
3. Enable access to Rapid Antigen Testing for all staff and visitors
4. Make available surge staffing availability

In addition, the ANMF will be collaborating with the Tasmanian Department of Health on behalf of aged care members via the State COVID Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) stakeholder meetings. The ANMF will continue to raise matters that the Department of Health may be able to provide to assist aged care facilities such as training, education, and advice.

The ANMF Tasmanian Branch is 8000 plus members strong! Supporting nurses, midwives, and care workers as the only union in Tasmania employing nurses and care workers to represent members. This is why our Organisers and Member Support Team are uniquely positioned to understand your experiences, represent you in your workplace, and offer industrial advice that's relevant to you.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact our Member Support Team via email on membersupport@anmftas.org.au. Email is the preferred and fastest way of contacting the team. Alternatively, you can phone (03) 6223 6777.

Authorised by Emily Shepherd, ANMF Tasmanian Branch Secretary

25 January 2022