

2 September 2020

Dear Residents and Families

Re: Japara COVID-19 Update

As community transmissions of COVID-19 Victoria are thankfully lessening, I am pleased to be able to let you know that we are seeing a similar trend in the number of Japara's Victorian homes with outbreaks. With all of us having been through these challenging times I thought it an appropriate moment to reflect on the experience of recent months and keep you informed of the current situation across Japara homes.

As no doubt you are aware, in late January 2020, Australia identified its first case of COVID-19 in a returning traveller but it was not until 11 March 2020 that the World Health Organisation declared a global pandemic. We have all felt the devastating impact on the whole aged care sector in Australia and around the world.

At Japara, our highest priority has been to keep our residents and staff safe, supported and well.

Japara began COVID-19 preparations in February. This planning included:

- Seeking to prevent the entry of COVID into Japara homes as much as possible
- Having a clear and rehearsed Emergency Response Plan ready in the event there were cases at a home (as has occurred in Victoria)
- Identifying learnings from each experience at a Japara home and applying those learnings to future cases.

We also engaged an Infection Control expert, initiated the early application of strict biosecurity measures, established an Emergency Response Committee and worked on detailed action plans, ran outbreak simulations, trained 6,000 staff in infection control measures, increased cleaning shifts, built additional reserves of PPE, implemented visitation restrictions, enforced compulsory flu vaccinations and adopted the single home per worker policy.

These precautions were aimed at reducing the risk of infection into a home and if an infection did occur, containing its further spread to the extent possible.

Despite the great precautions taken, and having made it through the first wave of infections with next to no exposure, as community transmissions grew in Victoria's second wave, so cases began to emerge in our homes.

Japara has 33 homes in Victoria and has had outbreaks at five. These outbreaks appear to be de-escalating at four homes with stabilising or falling active cases. However, I am extremely saddened to advise that a number of our much-loved residents have passed away and our most sincere and heartfelt condolences go to their families and friends.

While we hope the worst is well behind us, over the last two months we have:

- worked effectively with the various Government departments available to assist. These include the relevant public health unit, AUSMAT, the Department of Health (Commonwealth), The Department of Health & Human Services (State), the Victorian Aged Care Response Centre and the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission amongst others
- ensured access to a skilled workforce when a number of our staff have been infected and others are deemed close contacts and must isolate. This has been challenging. We have managed this through the generosity of Japara staff from interstate and regional homes, who have assisted enormously by

coming to Victoria to support outbreak sites. Our deepest gratitude is to these and our other staff for their ongoing commitment and work ethic

- worked to contain the spread through cohorting. This means grouping COVID-19 positive residents together where possible. Expert advice is sought on this issue reflecting the particular home's configuration, access to staff and resident profile
- communicated extensively with residents, staff and families of the homes where we have had infections. This includes immediately advising those residents who test positive and advising their next of kin via phone, communicating via letter and text of the overall home's results to all families after each testing round and hosting Zoom sessions for affected site families, residents and staff.

A key point of community discussion has been transferring positive but otherwise well residents to hospital. As much as that is the wish of providers and families in an effort to minimise the spread of COVID-19 in a home, the regulations in Victoria do not allow transfer to hospital of a positive resident unless their clinical condition warrants it.

In closing I would like to thank our residents and their families for whom COVID-19 has been confronting and frightening, for their strength and support. Please note that we continue to apply the utmost vigilance to prevent the entry and spread of COVID-19 in our homes and our absolute priority is to keep our residents and staff safe, supported and well.

Should you wish to know more or discuss the situation please contact your home manager.

Yours sincerely



Chris Price

Chief Executive Officer