



Senator Katy Gallagher
Chair
Senate Select Committee on COVID-19
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Senator Gallagher

I wish to provide additional information to add to the record of the hearings on 4 August 2020 of the Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 (the Committee).

Further to the advice I provided to the Committee as detailed on page 8 of the enclosed transcript, I wish to inform the Committee that I have become aware that on Friday, 10 July 2020, St Basil's Home for the Aged in Victoria (St Basil's) responded to our Assessment Contact Program (telephone survey). During this telephone call, the St Basil's representative provided information that one staff member of the service was diagnosed with COVID-19 on 8 July 2020 and the Public Health Unit (PHU) had been advised.

The Commission is not the first responder to an outbreak in an aged care facility. The telephone contact was part of a specially designed activity by the Commission to contact every residential aged care service in Victoria and metropolitan Sydney to seek assurances from providers that COVID-19 response plans had been developed and were ready for immediate activation.

The regulatory official from the Commission who made the assessment contact referred the service's responses to the Commission's COVID-19 Response Team and this information was escalated internally and recorded in the Commission's daily COVID-19 confirmed case tracker.

The Commission did not escalate the matter externally at the time because the St Basil's representative had confirmed in the interview that they had advised the PHU of the outbreak. The representative also confirmed that they had read the "First 24 hours" document.

The process required for a provider to notify of an outbreak is set out in the Commonwealth Department of Health document "First 24 hours – Managing COVID-19 in a residential aged care facility" (published on 29 June 2020). The four actions listed under "First 30 minutes" are:

1. Isolate and inform the COVID-19 positive case(s)
2. Contact your local Public Health Unit (PHU)
3. Contact the Commonwealth Department of Health
4. Lockdown the residential aged care facility.

The Commission was subsequently advised about the outbreak at St Basil's by the Commonwealth Department of Health on 14 July 2020.

To manage any risks of provider failure to notify the relevant authorities of a COVID-19 outbreak, the Commission now has arrangements in place to confirm immediately with the Commonwealth Department of Health that they have been directly notified by the affected aged care service of any outbreak at that service that comes to the Commission's attention by whatever means.

I hope this information clarifies the situation.

Yours sincerely

Janet Anderson PSM
Commissioner

7 August 2020

Enc. Proof Committee Hansard – Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 – 4 August 2020

CHAIR: So it wasn't part of any sort of pandemic/outbreak planning that you might lose a whole workforce?

Prof. Murphy: No. It's very unusual for every single member of the staff to be classed as a close contact, and that's only the case because the infected worker had worked a number of shifts. In Dorothy Henderson Lodge and in Newmarch it was only a proportion of the workforce that were furloughed, so the surge workforce could come in and replace them. When you lose the entire workforce, particularly in a facility which is culturally and linguistically diverse—the workforce was mainly Greek-speaking and the first language of many of the residents was not English—it's a challenge. A workforce had to be brought together from a variety of sources: agency workforce, some from Aspen and some from the health service. We recruited nurses from private hospitals. There was a huge burst of activity to bring a workforce together to staff that facility.

CHAIR: Can you give me any details of the cost and the contract with Aspen Medical in terms of going into St Basil's, or is it part of a bigger contract with them?

Mr Lye: It's part of a bigger contract.

CHAIR: Okay—well, whatever information you can provide to the committee on that would be useful.

Ms Laffan: The value of that contract is \$15,675,779.20.

CHAIR: And is that to cover a period of time and a range of services?

Ms Laffan: A range of services. Where funding is not used, it can be returned under that contract.

CHAIR: And that is specifically in relation to aged care?

Ms Laffan: It is.

CHAIR: How many facilities are Aspen working in at the moment?

Ms Laffan: I'd have to take that on notice.

CHAIR: Okay.

Ms Laffan: Sorry, but each of the facilities would have received a visit from an Aspen clinical first responder.

Mr Lye: And St Basil's.

CHAIR: In each of the 97 facilities?

Ms Laffan: Correct.

CHAIR: So they were going in to do an overview, were they?

Mr Lye: An account of it.

Ms Laffan: An assessment, yes.

CHAIR: Is that part of your team, Ms Anderson? You're doing that as well? You're doing an assessment, aren't you, of outbreak preparedness?

Ms Anderson: Yes, but that's not at the point of an outbreak. The clinical first responder tasked—

CHAIR: They do it at the outbreak; you do it before. Ms Anderson, you weren't aware of the situation in St Basil's until the 14th either. Is that correct?

Ms Anderson: That's correct.

CHAIR: Are you looking at why that system broke down to make sure it doesn't happen again, because it would seem to me that's five pretty important days that were lost there?

Ms Anderson: My understanding is Professor Murphy is looking at standing up a team.

Prof. Murphy: We're doing a formal review of the St Basil's outbreak. It is the same review team that have done the reviews of Dorothy Henderson Lodge and Newmarch. Minister Colbeck has been very clear that when we have an outbreak where there are significant issues he wants a formal review. The families of the St Basil's residents are also very concerned. We've engaged Mr Alan Lilly and Professor Gilbert, who did the two big reviews in New South Wales. Mr Lilly is engaging in a Zoom call with the families, I think tomorrow night, to get their initial feedback. He will be doing a formal review of all of the circumstances and the response for the minister.

CHAIR: Are any of those reviews going to be public, Minister? I know Dorothy Henderson Lodge has been completed. I understand Newmarch House is due to be completed this week. Are they going to be released for the public?

Senator Colbeck: The commitment to Newmarch has already been to release it. The DHL, Dorothy Henderson Lodge, went to national cabinet and has been provided to the aged care royal commission, which means it will be publicly released. But I'm happy to provide that to the committee.