

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Australian Government's response to the COVID 19 outbreak

29 May 2020

PDR Number: IQ20-000293

Question Subject: CMO advice regarding Newmarch

Type of Question: Written

Senator: Katy Gallagher

Question:

- Did the CMO provide advice to Anglicare, the NSW Government or the Federal Department of Health about whether infected and unwell residents should be transferred to hospital or stay at Newmarch Home?
- Were the families of those residents who tested positive to COVID-19 at Newmarch House part of the decision making process on whether to transfer residents to a hospital or keep them at the facility? If yes, please provide details. If no, why not?
- Why was there was a second wave of infection at Newmarch House?
- Was the testing regime for staff and residents the same for Dorothy Henderson Lodge, Opal Bankstown and Newmarch House? If no, what was the different approach and why?
- Were enough staff tested in a timely manner given the rate of infection among aged care workers at Newmarch House? What could have been done differently to improve the response?

Answer:

1. No. The Commonwealth Chief Medical Officer (CMO) did not provide advice about whether infected and unwell residents should be transferred to hospital or stay at Newmarch House to Anglican Community Services, the NSW Government or the Federal Department of Health (the Department). However, the Deputy CMO was part of the high-level case management group that discussed a range of issues and options related to Newmarch House residents including the possibility of hospital transfer and the cohorting of residents within Newmarch House.

2. The Department is aware that several residents and families were consulted regarding potential relocations from Newmarch House. The Department does not have details of those discussions. To manage the COVID-19 outbreak and provide clinical support to residents at Newmarch House, the NSW Ministry of Health employed the Hospital-in-Home clinical management model. Any decision to relocate residents to an offsite hospital setting would be taken on the best available medical advice, with careful consideration of the individual's wishes, including any advanced care directives that may be in place.
3. The Department is not aware of a second wave of infection at Newmarch House.
4. The NSW public health unit (PHU) is responsible for determining the testing regime during an outbreak. Testing was undertaken according to the circumstances at each service. In each service, all staff and residents were tested and ongoing testing was conducted for the duration of each outbreak.
5. Testing of staff and residents at Newmarch House occurred from 12 April 2020, following a staff member returning a positive test on 11 April 2020.
 - a. Newmarch House arranged for residents displaying symptoms to be tested on-site between 12 and 14 April 2020.
 - b. Staff identified as close contacts by the NSW PHU were directed to be tested off-site at the Nepean Hospital between 12 and 14 April 2020.
 - c. All Newmarch House residents were tested on-site over 14 and 15 April 2020 by the NSW PHU.
 - d. All staff on duty were tested on-site on 14 April 2020, any staff not on duty were asked to go to the Nepean Hospital for priority testing.
 - e. Ongoing testing was undertaken at the direction of the NSW PHU throughout the outbreak. The majority of testing was undertaken on-site with an off-site option available for staff. Testing regimes and the type of tests used were determined by the NSW PHU.