

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Australian Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Written Questions from 21 August 2020

PDR Number: IQ20-000515

Support to residents and aged care workers:

Written

Senator: Kristina Keneally

Question:

- Is the Federal Government providing any funding to the Victorian Government so it can provide for more infection control training? If yes, please provide details. If not, why not?
- How much funding has been provided by the Federal Government to deploy five new COVID-19 testing teams to test staff and resident in residential aged care services located across metropolitan Melbourne and the Mitchell Shire? If funding has been provided please detail the amount.
- Is this funding new or existing? If it is from existing or already announced funding please provide what funding package/program was used and the date it was announced? If no funding was provided, why not?

Answer:

Infection Prevention and Control training

Since March 2020, the Australian Government has invested more than \$1.8 billion to support the aged care sector's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For the residential care sector, including providers in Victoria, this includes COVID-19 supplements, at a value of more than \$420 million. This funding assists providers with additional costs preparing for and responding to COVID-19, including costs associated with infection prevention and control (IPC) training.

The 2020–21 Budget included \$9.1 million to establish the Victorian Aged Care Response Centre (VACRC). Through VACRC, the Victorian Government has facilitated intensive IPC training for aged care workers, building on the training program released by the Australian Government earlier in the year. This has been complemented by teams of Australian Defence Force personnel conducting clinical screens and assessing IPC practices.

As per the 21 August 2020 commitments of National Cabinet, all jurisdictions including Victoria have undertaken an extensive amount of work to uplift IPC capacity across the residential aged care sector. This has occurred through a range of modalities, including:

- IPC train-the-trainer sessions at the provider level (with providers to then flow this training on to individual services) and/or providing face-to-face training on-site at services.
- Delivering webinar style training, with recordings often made available online to support ongoing preparedness; and
- Developing jurisdictional guidance resources and online courses (in addition to the Commonwealth's online modules).

To support these activities, and in response to Recommendation 6 of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety's *Aged Care and COVID-19: a special report*, the Australian Government is currently working with all jurisdictions to finalise a new schedule to the National Partnership on COVID-19 Response.

Under this Schedule, the Australian Government will contribute 100 per cent of costs incurred from 1 July 2020 to support states to deliver:

- IPC training and support in residential aged care facilities (RACFs)
- prevention, preparedness and response activities to address a COVID-19 outbreak in RACFs.

Asymptomatic testing

On 16 July 2020, five COVID-19 mobile testing clinics commenced testing asymptomatic staff and residents in residential aged care services located across metropolitan Melbourne and the Mitchell Shire. Aspen Medical was engaged to deliver the program, initially until 30 September 2020.

In September 2020 the asymptomatic testing program was extended with boosted capacity to assist the aged care sector to further drive down case numbers. Aspen Medical's contract was extended to 30 November 2020 to continue asymptomatic testing of aged care workers. The total contract value is \$5.8 million (GST exclusive). This activity is funded from the 2020–21 Budget: \$101.2 million *Aged Care COVID-19 Preparedness* measure.

The 2020–21 Budget also provides funding of \$145.9 million in 2019–20 to 2020–21 under *Guaranteeing Medicare – COVID-19 Pandemic Response – Pathology*, for the provision of COVID-19 pathology testing in aged care (residents and workers). This funding provides for the in-reach pathology testing program delivered by Sonic Healthcare until 31 March 2021. The in-reach pathology testing program includes capacity for regular testing of asymptomatic aged care workers in Victoria. Bulk-billed Medicare tests for asymptomatic Victorian aged care workers and home care workers is also part of the measure.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Australian Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Written Question received 21 August 2020

PDR Number: IQ20-000524

Infection control protocols for rural and remote aged care providers

Written

Senator: Rachel Siewert

Question:

What are you doing to encourage and support rural and remote aged care providers to review their infection control protocols and increase their clinical care capability, for example through the provision of registered nurses?

Answer:

Aged care provider obligations

Under the Aged Care Quality Standards, providers are responsible for their infection control practices and procedures, including the appropriate use of personal protective equipment (PPE), and ensuring infection prevention and control is sufficient for each facility.

Residential Aged Care Facility COVID-19 Support Payment

On 31 August 2020, the Government announced an additional \$245 million, including for a second lump sum COVID-19 Support Payment, to assist residential aged care facilities with the additional costs associated with preparing for and responding to COVID-19. Providers received around \$900 per resident in major metropolitan areas and around \$1,350 per resident in all other areas.

Providers are required to use this payment to fund and support enhanced infection control capability, including through an on-site clinical lead, infection prevention and control lead (IPC Lead). The IPC Lead will provide leadership and increase capacity in relation to IPC, and residential aged care providers will be required to demonstrate compliance with the IPC Lead requirement as a condition of accreditation via the Aged Care Quality Standards.

- In response to Recommendation 5 of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety's *Aged Care and COVID-19: a special report*.

Funding can also be used to address other COVID-19 related costs such as increased staffing costs, communications with families and managing visitation arrangements.

Infection prevention and control training

As at 26 February 2021, 1,504,219 people have completed the Commonwealth's foundational IPC online training course for care workers, including 218,511 aged care workers (this includes care workers in rural, regional and remote areas).

As per the 21 August 2020 commitments of National Cabinet, all jurisdictions have undertaken an extensive amount of work to uplift IPC capacity across the residential aged care sector, including with rural and remote providers. This has occurred through a range of modalities, including:

- IPC train-the-trainer sessions at the provider level (with providers to then flow this training on to individual services) and/or providing face-to-face training on-site at services
- delivering webinar style training, with recordings often made available online to support ongoing preparedness
- developing jurisdictional guidance resources and online courses (in addition to the Commonwealth's online modules).

To support these activities, and in response to Recommendation 6 of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety's *Aged Care and COVID-19: a special report*, the Australian Government is currently working with all jurisdictions to finalise a new schedule to the National Partnership on COVID-19 Response.

Under this Schedule, the Australian Government will contribute 100 per cent of costs incurred from 1 July 2020 to support states to deliver in residential aged care facilities:

- IPC training and support
- prevention, preparedness and response activities to address a COVID-19 outbreak.

Aged Care Quality Safety Commission

The Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (Commission) commenced additional Infection Control Monitoring visits in Victoria from 3 August 2020 in response to the increasing risk of COVID-19 outbreaks in residential aged care services, following significant community transmission of COVID-19 in Victoria.

The purpose of the visit is to observe infection control practices, to ensure that staff, management and visitors are adhering to safe PPE protocols and to safe infection control arrangements, as required under the quality standards.

The Commission has extended the infection control monitoring program rolled out in Victoria into other jurisdictions, working in partnership with local health authorities. This program is in addition to the Commission's usual assessment and auditing program, and includes spot checks to residential aged care services, without an outbreak, to check compliance with PPE and infection control arrangements.

As at 25 February 2021, the Commission has undertaken 2,458 spot checks of 2,011 residential aged care services. More broadly, between 1 March 2020 and 25 February 2021, the Commission has undertaken:

- 3,238 total visits – this comprised 2,662 unannounced visits
- 576 announced/short notice visits
- 2,674 of these visits related to infection control (includes, but is not limited to spot checks).

The Commission also undertakes a range of other activities to support COVID-19 response preparedness, including:

- telephone contacts to residential services when hot-spots and/or lockdowns have been declared
- publishing a range of COVID-19 provider focused resources, such as:
 - o practical [outbreak management guidance](#) to support COVID-19 outbreak management planning and preparation
 - o capturing the experiences of affected residential aged care providers in the Victorian second wave (July 2020) to build on [lessons-learnt](#).

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Australian Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Written Question from 21 August 2020

PDR Number: IQ20-000571

Support to residents and aged care workers:

Written

Senator: Kristina Keneally

Question:

Support to residents and aged care workers

- As announced on 19 July, 2020 please provide details around the collaboration the Federal Government undertook with the Victorian Government to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 into Aged Care services? Please provide the following details in relation to each measure that was collaborated on:
 - The name of the measure(s) or the process(s) that was agreed to including which tier of government has responsibility for that measure or process.
 - The amount of funding tied to each measure or process as a total that the Federal Government has responsibility for and the amount of funding provided by the Federal Government.
 - If there is funding from the Federal Government is this funding new or from existing funds? Please provide this funding across the forward estimates if applicable as well as the name of the program the funding has or will come from.
 - If funding has been provided for any of the measures listed in the media release has any of it already been announced by the Federal Government during March, April, May, June or July of this year? If yes, please provide what funding package/program was used and the date it was announced. What date will/was the measure established? Is there a completion date for this measure? If yes, please provide the date.
- Please provide a list of the representatives from the aged care sector that the Federal Government collaborated with in relation to these additional measures? Please provide the date(s) that the collaboration took place.
- How is the Federal Government working in partnership with the Victorian Aged Care Industry (VACI) leaders? Please provide details.
- Please provide a list of the leaders from the VACI that the Federal Government has or is working in partnership with.
 - When did the Federal Government meet with this group?

- Has the Federal Government provided the VACI with any funding? If yes, please provide the amount of funding and what the funding will be used for?
- Please provide the amount of funding that has or will be allocated to Workforce funding support as announced on 19 July, 2020 for each of the four measures listed in the media release.
 - Is the funding that will be made available by the Federal Government to residential and home care providers as announced on 19 July, 2020 for Workforce funding support new or existing?
 - Please provide a breakdown of the amount of funding that is new or existing for each of the four measures. Are any of the funding amounts from already announced measures that were made in March, April or May of this year? If yes, please provide details. A statement below was made in the media release dated 19 July, 2020.

Answer:

See attached.

Questions 1a)-d); 5a)-b)

Measure or process name and responsible party	Australian Government Funding	Funding source and profile	Date funding first announced	Additional context/information
Workforce Funding Support Australian Government	\$92.4m	New funding 2020-21 <i>(This answer also addresses question 5a))</i>	19 July 2020	<p>This funding is being delivered through the Support for Aged Care Workers in COVID-19 (SACWIC) grant.</p> <p>The announcement outlined four broad purposes for which this funding could be accessed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Additional costs associated with employee entitlement and with working at a single site - Engaging and training additional staff where these are needed for backfill or extra capacity - Paid leave where workers have to isolate or are restricted from travel - Support accommodation arrangements for workers where needed <p>These are not four distinct measures but rather purposes for which reimbursement can be claimed, with further detail set out in the grant guidelines. Funding amounts are not specifically tied to these categories – amounts are paid for any eligible claim, as specified in the grant guidelines.</p> <p><i>(This information also addresses questions 5b)</i></p>
Industry program to reduce workforce sharing across site Aged Care Industry and Peaks	\$760,000	New funding – Aged Care Preparedness Measure	11 March 2020	<p>These guidelines work in concert with the Workforce Support Funding outlined above. Providers that adhere to the guidelines can claim reimbursement for costs to ensure no provider or worker is out of pocket as a result of this.</p>

More infection control training Victorian Government	Nil	N/A	N/A	This measure is being delivered by the Victorian Government. On 19 July 2020, the Victorian Government announced it would commence additional intensive training in infection control for aged care workers, building on the training program released by the Australian Government earlier in the year.
National Partnership on COVID-19 Response Schedule C – Aged Care	\$57.8m	National Partnership on COVID-19 Response	16 December 2020	The Australian Government will increase its contribution under the National Partnership on COVID-19 Response from 50 to 100 per cent for activity by the states to support aged care services, particularly infection and prevention control (IPC) training, and co-ordinated preparedness and response.
Enhanced surveillance and increased contact tracing Australian Government	Support was in-kind	N/A	19 July 2020	<p>The Australian Government's Department of Health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - assisted the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services to undertake contact tracing through the National Incident Room to assist Victoria. (approx 1,400 interviews). - coordinated the provision of three Australian Medical Assistance Teams (AUSMAT) to Victoria to support and act under the direction of the Victorian Aged Care Response Centre (VACRC) to assist with the management of COVID-19. <p>The Commonwealth Chief Nurse and Midwifery Officer was on the ground in Victoria assisting with the response, in particular in the aged care sector.</p>
Testing Australian Government	\$5.9m	<p>Sourced from new funding announced on 11 March 2020 (\$101.2m)</p> <p>The \$5.9m is 2020-21 only.</p>	11 March 2020	<p>On 16 July the Australian Government established five mobile testing teams to support testing of asymptomatic staff and residents in aged care homes located across metropolitan Melbourne and the Mitchell Shire. This activity was funded through the COVID-19 Aged Care Preparedness measure. Funding for this measure includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - \$101.2 million announced on 11 March 2020 (over two years); and - \$103.4 million announced on 21 August 2020 (over one year). <p>This is all new funding.</p> <p>On 30 September 2020, the Australian Government announced testing of asymptomatic aged care workers will continue in Victoria to help detect areas of community transmission before outbreaks in aged care services occur.</p>
Additional capacity to care for aged care	\$1.3 billion (estimate)	New funding	13 March 2020	On 13 March 2020, the Australian Government and all states and territories agreed the National Partnership on COVID-19 Response (the Partnership).

residents from outbreak sites	only – funding is demand driven and uncapped)	2019-20/2020-21		<p>The Partnership ensures the capacity of the Australian health system is lifted to effectively assess, diagnose, and treat people with COVID-19 while minimising the spread of the disease in the community.</p> <p>The Partnership was amended by all governments in April to include the private hospital viability guarantee. The Commonwealth provides a 100 per cent contribution to the gap between each private hospital's minimum viability costs and any revenue received by that private hospital (such as private patient activity or activity funded by the state). In return, private hospitals agree that their capacity can be directed as necessary to support the response to outbreaks.</p> <p>Under the Partnership, state and territory governments remain the system managers of Australia's public hospital systems, as they are best placed to direct their public health services to take the necessary actions in responding to the COVID-19 outbreak.</p>
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Question 2:

The Department worked with the aged care sector and other interested stakeholders multiple times weekly in the development and delivery of relevant measures in this package.

- Aged and Community Services Australia (ACSA)
- Leading Age Services Australia (LASA)
- The Aged Care Guild
- Australian Council of Trade Unions
- Health Workers Union
- Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation
- Health Services Union

The Department has had regular engagement with all aged care sector peaks, providers and consumers since March in relation to COVID-19 measures.

The Department has collaborated with experts in the Victorian Aged Care Response Centre to refine the delivery of the asymptomatic testing program.

Questions 3, 4 a)-b):

In response to the second wave outbreak of COVID-19 in Greater Melbourne and Mitchell Shire, Industry leaders developed the Guiding Principles for Residential Aged Care – keeping Victorian Residents and Workers safe (Principles). The development of the Principles was supported by the Australian Government, peak bodies and unions.

The CEO of Regis led a group of industry representatives including from:

- Estia
- Bluecross
- Arcare

This group developed the Guiding Principles and the Commonwealth participated in these discussions. The CEO of Regis also engaged with peaks and union representatives before the Principles were finalised. This group first met on 17 July 2020 to develop the principles. Collaboration continued in the lead up to the release of the Principles on 22 July 2020. No funding was provided.

After the principles were announced an Advisory Committee was established to oversee the implementation of the Guiding Principles. The Australian Government was a member of this committee, which also included:

- Aged and Community Services Australia (ACSA)
- Leading Age Services Australia (LASA)
- The Aged Care Guild
- Australian Council of Trade Unions
- Health Workers Union
- Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation
- Health Services Union

Attachment B provides a list of additional supports provided by the Australian Government in relation to the Victorian COVID-19 Response.

Measure	Description
<i>Workforce surge measures (Commenced in March 2020)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This activity is funded through the 2020-21 Budget, Aged Care COVID-19 Preparedness measure. Funding for this measure includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ \$101.2 million announced on 11 March 2020 (over two years); and ○ \$103.4 million announced on 21 August 2020 (over one year). • The aged care workforce surge measures were established to complement existing staff and provide critical surge cover where providers were not able to find staff through their usual recruitment channels. • Providers directly impacted by COVID-19 can seek reimbursement of workforce costs through the COVID-19 Aged Care Support Program. • Prior to the major outbreak in Victoria, the Department had already added significantly to its workforce surge arrangements through contracts with RCSA and Healthcare Australia. • As at 3 January 2021, the following workforce surge support has been provided to aged care facilities across Australia to boost workforce: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 24,746 shifts filled by Recruitment, Consulting and Staffing Association (RCSA) staff. ○ 5,249 shifts filled by Healthcare Australia staff (workforce surge). ○ 2,295 shifts filled by Healthcare Australia staff (NACER teams). ○ 2,711 shifts filled by 130 Mable contractors in 133 positions. ○ 700 roles filled by 268 Aspen Medical staff, including clinical first responder deployments. ○ 1,318 shifts filled by 37 HealthX staff. ○ 1,208 shifts filled by Torrens staff. • VACRC partnered with the aviation industry, including Qantas and Virgin, to deploy Residential Aged Care Assistants (RACAs) to support care delivery in aged care facilities across Victoria. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 54 RACAs completed 832 shifts across six facilities. This role has now ceased. • 47 Residential Aged Care Safety Observers (RACSO) completed 1,346 shifts across 18 facilities. RACSOs monitored IPC protocols and implemented corrective actions where required. RACSO deployments ceased on 4 November 2020. • The VACRC has deployed RACVAs to assist residents with visitation and basic care and support. Since 26 October 2020: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 55 RACVAs have completed 1,270 shifts across Victorian residential aged care facilities. All available RACVAs have been deployed. •

<p><i>Victorian Aged Care Response Centre</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 2020-21 Budget includes \$9.1 million to establish the Victorian Aged Care Response Centre (VACRC) to coordinate support to each aged care provider experiencing a COVID-19 outbreak in Victoria. • The Government is providing \$8.2 million to extend the VACRC until 30 June 2021 to ensure the dedicated scalable support remains in place to rapidly respond to the pandemic and coordinate the Victorian response to outbreaks in aged care. • The VACRC has brought together a workforce of more than 150 staff and experts from across 28 agencies including Australian and Victorian Government Departments and a number of hospitals and health services. • The VACRC has developed the Victorian Health Services Coordination Hub model to enhance surveillance of outbreaks in the aged care sector. Nine health service hubs – four in metropolitan Melbourne and five in regional Victoria – unite state and federal responsibilities and priorities. • Australian Medical Assistance Teams (AUSMAT) were deployed to support impacted aged care facilities and minimise risk associated with the management of COVID-19. AUSMAT personnel completed 174 visits to 80 Victorian aged care facilities. • More than 170 ADF personnel have supported the work of VACRC. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teams of ADF personnel have attended 593 residential aged care facilities to date to conduct clinical screens and assess IPC practices. ○ ADF teams conducted 679 preventative support visits. • VACRC has partnered with the aviation industry, including Qantas and Virgin, to develop an innovative Residential Aged Care Assistant role to support care delivery in aged care facilities across Victoria. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ As at 14 October 2020, 54 Residential Aged Care Assistants (RACA) completed 832 shifts across six facilities. This role has now ceased. • As at 4 November 2020, 47 Residential Aged Care Safety Observers (RACSO) completed 1,346 shifts across 18 facilities. RACSOs monitored IPC protocols and implemented corrective actions where required. RACSO deployments ceased on 4 November 2020. • The VACRC has deployed Residential Aged Care Visitation Assistants (RACVAs) to assist residents with visitation and basic care and support. Since 26 October 2020: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 55 RACVAs have completed 1,270 shifts across Victorian residential aged care facilities. All available RACVAs have been deployed. • In August 2020, VACRC coordinated a cross government effort to manage a 100-fold increase in clinical waste bring produced at aged care facilities with outbreaks. The VACRC continues to support facilities that require urgent clinical waste assistance. • Daily Zoom meetings and webinars with providers are continuing to assist with return to work arrangements
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	for furloughed staff. Fifteen meetings have been held to date with around 500 participants.
<i>Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The National Medical Stockpile (NMS) is a strategic reserve of drugs, vaccines, antidotes and PPE for use in national health emergencies. These items are secured by the NMS to ensure that Australia is more self-sufficient during an emergency and able to meet high levels of demand. • Since March 2020, the Commonwealth Government has been working with state and territory governments to ensure aged care facilities have sufficient PPE. PPE is dispatched both directly from the National Medical Stockpile (NMS) and by jurisdictions on the NMS' behalf, depending on the specific circumstances. • As part of the Health Package: National Support for Ongoing Response announced on 11 March 2020, the Australian Government committed \$1.1 billion to increase the supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) and pharmaceuticals held in the NMS. • This investment has since expanded to \$3.3 billion, to ensure availability of essential PPE stocks and other medical equipment and supplies to help in preventing the transmission of COVID-19. In total, over half a billion masks have been secured for staggered delivery into the NMS through to 2021. • All requests from aged care providers managing a COVID-19 outbreak have been approved. • All requests for assistance outside of COVID-19 outbreaks, where aged care providers could not source PPE to meet a clinical need (i.e. to manage a gastrointestinal outbreak or similar) have been approved. • To date, the NMS has provided aged care facilities with approximately: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 20 million masks ○ 5 million gowns ○ 11 million gloves ○ 4 million goggles and face shields ○ 90,000 bottles of hand sanitiser ○ 165,000 clinical waste bags. • A range of resources and online training on the use of PPE is available on the Department's website for aged care workers.