



# NATIONAL AGED CARE EMERGENCY RESPONSE

## Briefing Pack – Aged Care Providers

20/08/2020

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### Overview

The National Aged Care Emergency Response (NACER) is an initiative of the Commonwealth Department of Health and the Australian aged care industry. The intent of NACER is to build a pool of staff – from areas outside of Victoria that don't have community transmission of COVID-19 – which can be deployed to assist aged care services with confirmed cases of COVID-19.

Currently, aged care services in Victoria are experiencing large numbers of COVID-19 cases among residents and staff. This is compromising their ability to provide adequate care and this may get worse. They need more support to protect the health and wellbeing of the older Australians in their services.

We need experienced Registered Nurses, Enrolled Nurses, Personal Care Workers and Cleaners who are not in a COVID-19 vulnerable group. We expect you will identify staff through an Expression of Interest. Additionally, you will need to endorse staff as having the necessary qualifications, skills, experience and ability to cope under pressure and in confronting environments.

Staff will need to:

- have a current national police check (consistent with the requirements - including the recording and system requirements - in the Accountability Principles 2014 made pursuant to the *Aged Care Act 1997*)
- have a current influenza vaccination
- have demonstrated appropriate and current competencies, qualifications and knowledge, to effectively perform their roles as required by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) where appropriate

- obtain a Victorian worker's permit (the Department of Health will help arrange this)
- not have recently undertaken overseas travel or had any known contact with COVID -19 which would preclude their deployment (or, if they have, they may be asked to isolate in advance of commencing their deployment).

Ideally, teams of six people will be sent to aged care services for a minimum of four weeks, followed by two weeks of quarantine for each person which will take place when they return home.

The safety of aged care workers is paramount. Staff must complete the Government's Infection Prevention and Control training prior to deployment, particularly the instructions on donning and doffing PPE. As part of a full support structure, staff will receive:

- uniforms and PPE
- regular COVID-19 tests during deployment
- access to mental health support on the ground.

The service your staff will be working at will have or have had confirmed cases of COVID-19. Despite these protections above, there is a risk they could be infected with COVID-19.

Staff will be provided accommodation near the service they will be working at, and daily transport to and from work, will be provided. Staff will be subject to Victorian Stage 4 restrictions.

The Commonwealth Government will be funding a remuneration package for deployment including:

- their casual based on current employment arrangements and any applicable loading including for weekends, time of day and public holidays
- a \$5,000 incentive payment on satisfactory completion of their deployment
- all reasonable interstate travel and accommodation
- all reasonable medical, accommodation and food expenses in the event that they become ill during their deployment
- a tax-free travel allowance of \$128.70 per day for the period of deployment and during their quarantine period after the deployment
- wage payments during their quarantine period after the deployment based on their current entitlements.

A dedicated coordinator in Melbourne (National Aged Care Emergency Response Liaison) will support staff. The Coordinator will be required to make sure PPE, pastoral and mental health care arrangements are in place. It will also be a point of contact for staff to discuss any concerns they may have, including any problems with the service.

## Information for aged care providers

Aged care providers should carefully consider their own operational needs before agreeing to release staff. Aged care providers will still be required to provide adequate staffing levels across all their sites to meet residents' needs.

Healthcare Australia Pty Limited (HCA) is being contracted by the Commonwealth to employ staff for the period of the deployment and quarantine. While on deployment, the organisation will provide staff with:

- wages based on current employment arrangements plus relevant casual loading
- shift penalties and overtime entitlements
- 9.5% Superannuation
- full work cover
- professional/medical indemnity insurance
- payment weekly.

The Commonwealth is funding the Aged Care Assistant Employment Program to help providers with Aged Care Assistants to backfill while their staff are deployed. Details of the program are available online at [www.dashcs.com.au/agedcare](http://www.dashcs.com.au/agedcare).

## FAQs

### QUESTION

### PROGRAM OVERVIEW

#### What roles are needed?

We urgently need personal care workers (PCW), registered nurses (RNs) and enrolled nurses (ENs), and cleaners to support aged care residents in Melbourne's COVID-19 hot spots.

Staff should be endorsed by you as having good character and have the necessary qualifications, skills, experience and ability to cope under pressure and in confronting environments.

Ideally we need teams of six including one RN, one EN, three PCWs and one cleaner.

#### Who has organised the program?

The Commonwealth Department of Health has organised this critical national program with the aged care industry. The Department is working closely with aged care providers to identify teams for deployment.

**QUESTION****TIMING**

**How long will my staff be deployed to Melbourne?**

Staff will be deployed to Melbourne for four weeks and then go into two weeks of hotel quarantine, as per current regulations in each state and territory.

The quarantine requirements and regulations from each state and territory are regularly reviewed and subject to change.

**How much notice will I receive before one of my staff members is deployed?**

There is an urgent need for a skilled and experienced aged care workforce. The National Aged Care Emergency Response (NACER) Liaison is seeking to deploy staff as quickly as possible.

You may withdraw staff, noting that relevant quarantine regulations still apply and bonus payments would be paid pro rata.

**What happens if one of my staff chooses to extend their deployment?**

For their own health and wellbeing, staff members will need to return home after four weeks and will then have two weeks in quarantine. They may then reapply for deployment. They will need your approval to reapply.

**LIABILITY**

**Do I remain liable for my staff while they are on deployment?**

No. HCA is being contracted by the Commonwealth to employ your staff during deployment and quarantine.

**What are my workplace health and safety obligations while my staff are on deployment?**

The service hosting your staff member (and HCA as the employer at the time) will take responsibility for workplace health and safety obligations during the deployment and quarantine of staff.

**QUESTION****DEPLOYMENT**

**Who is managing the deployment?**

The National Aged Care Emergency Response (NACER) Liaison is being managed within the Victorian Aged Care Response Centre (VACRC).

The NACER Melbourne Coordinator will support deployed staff on the ground.

There will be a single point of contact in the NACER Melbourne Coordinator for participating staff and their existing employer.

The team will liaise between staff and the VACRC, and will organise: the initial deployment of staff; managing logistics including provision of PPE; pastoral and psychological care; and be a point of escalation for any concerns staff may have, including with the situation at the service.

Each service (through their Critical Incident Responder) will be responsible for the day-to-day management of their service, including orientation of incoming staff members.

**Can my staff choose which service they will be working in?**

Staff will be sent to the area most in need. The Victorian Aged Care Response Centre will decide where each team will be sent. Teams will be deployed together for four weeks.

**Will my staff be working at a single service or more than one?**

The Victorian Aged Care Response Centre will endeavour to ensure your staff remain at a single site, noting that needs of services may change.

**What restrictions will apply to my staff while they are staying in Melbourne?**

All staff must follow the Victorian Government's current Stage 4 restrictions in response to COVID-19. Appropriate action will be taken if a staff member is found to be in breach of restrictions.

**QUESTION**

**ENTITLEMENTS & EXPENSES**

**What will my staff get paid?**

In addition to their usual wage entitlements (including any applicable loadings), staff will receive a \$5,000 incentive payment and a travel allowance of \$128.70 per day.

Your staff will be paid for their time in quarantine based on their casual rate for a 38 hour week or their average weekly wage, whichever is greater. The Commonwealth Government will cover their costs of their quarantine.

**Will I have to pay my staff during their deployment?**

No. Place your staff on leave without pay for the period of the deployment and quarantine.

**Am I required to pay for my staff's travel, accommodation and daily living allowance?**

No. Neither the providing nor the hosting aged care providers will be out of pocket for their reasonable expenses.

**Am I required to pay the costs to employ an Aged Care Assistant to backfill the roles of my staff who have been deployed under NACER?**

Aged care providers will not be out of pocket for reasonable costs.

When deciding to deploy staff, providers should consider their own operational needs ensuring you will not deplete your own resources and can maintain safe and adequate staffing levels before agreeing to release staff. The Commonwealth Government can provide assistance to backfill positions through the Aged Care Assistant Employment Program.

The only cost incurred by the provider is the hourly rate paid for the ACA to be on site. Details of the program are online at [www.dashcs.com.au](http://www.dashcs.com.au).

**If one of my staff members can only complete part of their deployment, will they still receive the incentive?**

The incentive will be paid upon completion of the four week deployment.

It may be paid on a case by case, pro rata basis to reflect the time spent on deployment. This will be dependent on why they do not complete their deployment.

**QUESTION**

**If a staff member completes multiple deployments over the COVID-19 response period, are they entitled to multiple incentive payments?**

Yes, the incentive payment is for each four-week deployment and two-week quarantine period.

Any staff member going on multiple deployments will need your approval. There may be other factors considered on a case-by-case basis to assess suitability for multiple deployments.

**Does payment for my staff include superannuation?**

Yes. Superannuation contributions will be met by the Commonwealth and paid for staff by HCA.

**HEALTH & SAFETY**

**What happens if any of my staff contract COVID-19 in Melbourne?**

We are taking reasonable precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19. We will be guided by the local health authorities and public health units if one of your staff contracts COVID-19.

We will consider repatriation to the staff member's home state on a case-by-case basis, once they have been cleared of COVID-19.

**Will my staff be provided with uniforms and PPE in Melbourne?**

Yes, we will provide staff on deployment with uniforms and all appropriate PPE. However, staff will need their own PPE (i.e. face mask) on the flight to Melbourne and until they arrive at their accommodation.

The Victorian Department of Health and Human Services regularly updates its PPE regulations. Staff on deployment must adhere to these requirements.

**What support will be available for my staff in Melbourne? Am I required to provide ongoing emotional support on their return?**

The health and wellbeing of staff and residents are first and foremost. Pastoral care will be available to staff for the duration of their time in Melbourne through chaplaincy and psychological support through an Employee Assistance Program. Each team will receive face-to-face training in infection control and donning and doffing PPE.

During quarantine and when returning home, we will provide staff with post deployment support and give a handover to your Employee Assistance Program should the staff member wish.

**QUESTION**

**QUARANTINE**

**Will staff have to quarantine when they return from Melbourne?**

Yes, all states have quarantine requirements for people returning from COVID-19 hot spots.

Your staff will need to comply with their home state quarantine directives, which may include hotel quarantine.

**What happens if one of my staff is unable to complete the deployment and returns early?**

For whatever reason, if a deployed staff member needs to return home they must quarantine — as per their state’s regulations — at the cost of the Commonwealth Department of Health.

The incentive payment will be paid pro rata on a case by case basis.

**MY ROLE & SERVICE**

**Am I required to approve every request for deployment?**

NACER requires resilient, experienced and appropriate people of good character. If you have such staff keen to be part of the Emergency Response, we ask that you seriously consider their application against our criteria.

You must also consider the care needs of your residents and your organisation’s operational requirements.

**Is there a limit to how many people can go from my service throughout the program?**

There is no limit to the number of people from your service who can contribute to the National Aged Care Emergency Response.

However, you need to be mindful of depleting your own resources. Consider carefully how many staff you can release to maintain safe and adequate staffing levels at your service.

**Am I required to provide any additional training for my staff?**

No. NACER will provide any additional training required.

**MORE INFORMATION**

**How do I find out more about the program?**

Further detailed information will be provided by the National Aged Care Emergency Response Liaison.

**QUESTION**

**Who do I talk to about my staff getting involved?**

Contact the National Aged Care Emergency Response Liaison. In the first instance, please email [nacer@health.gov.au](mailto:nacer@health.gov.au) for more information.

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