

Dear Clients, Carers and Family Members,

I hope you are well and not too overloaded with health messages at this time. We know that there is due concern regarding the spread of COVID-19 and while we have been so fortunate in WA, we are seeing an increased spread.

We want to assure you that we have been working hard in the background to introduce new ways of working, with our aim being to ensure the safety of our clients and our team members. Our COVID-19 Plan has been enacted over the previous two years, but it is different this time in that we are not responding to a lock down, rather we are seeing cases of spread of COVID-19 in our community. I'm sure you have questions of us, so I have listed some of those I believe would be most often asked. They will not cover all your questions, so please don't hesitate to contact me if you have others.

What are the Melville Cares team preparing for?

We are closely following the impact of COVID-19 over east and we are aware that our clients are in a vulnerable group for contracting the virus. We are anticipating that a number of our team members may need to isolate with suspected, or positive cases. We also expect that some of our clients and their close contacts will likely be impacted. Our COVID-19 Plan aims to respond to different scenarios with the purpose of keeping our clients and team members safe, while continuing to provide your services. We do expect the likelihood of reduced staffing availability and on occasion may need to cancel services, or send a different member of our team. While we are continually bringing on new team members as the demand for our services is so strong, our focus at the moment is to ensure ongoing services to you, our current clients, based on expected staffing shortages that may arise in the future.

What steps are Melville Cares taking to ensure our safety?

We have a comprehensive COVID-19 Plan which adheres to all government requirements. We review daily updates from a range of sources such as the Department of Health, peak bodies and media releases. We have appointed a COVID-19 Project Lead, Lauren, who is a Registered Nurse to oversee the Plan, embed the highest level of control and precaution, and respond to daily requirements.

What about the safety of the staff?

Our team members have all received infection control training, as well as being provided with personal protective equipment. All staff have received their two vaccinations and are required to have a booster in line with the Department of Health's mandate. We have also provided specialist training to staff who have volunteered to be part of our COVID-19 response team, so to continue delivering services to those who may be isolating with suspected COVID-19.

We have also split office staff into teams to limit personal contact and have moved from face to face catch ups, to online options.

What impact will this have on my services?

Our best outcome is that the impact is not significant, but that we will have a flexible approach to respond to the changes of the day.

Friendship Club and Melville Friends – as these venues are considered public spaces, as per the State Government mandate, we require proof of vaccination from clients attending and face masks are to be worn.

Transport – due to the close confines of the vehicles and higher risk to the driver and other passengers, we require proof of vaccination and masks are to be worn.

Services in my home – all team members coming to your home will be wearing face masks and undertaking regular infection control protocols. You will be encouraged to wear a face mask which the team member can provide you with.

Nursing and allied health – the same protocols will apply as per any staff member coming to your home.

Home and Garden Maintenance – will continue as per usual, with the team member wearing a mask when in the home.

Your coordinator will provide services as usual, but will restrict any face to face meetings with you. We want to ensure your safety and will take all measures to reduce unnecessary contact. Instead, we ask that you discuss any services or changes in your plan over the phone, or by Zoom, or Teams for those that use online services.

What if I choose not to be vaccinated?

Your preferences and privacy are always respected, but as the impact on those contracting COVID-19 are so much greater for those over 65, we are encouraging all clients to speak with their medical practitioner about any concerns they may have.

Depending on your circumstances you may be eligible for an exemption. From the information above, you will see that the Friendship Club, Melville Friends and transport services require proof of vaccination, or exemption. While we have not put this requirement in place for other services at this time, we will monitor this according to the risk to our team members attending and for other clients, and as such may require proof of vaccination for other services at a future time. A guideline regarding Refusal of Services has been developed and can be provided to you upon request.

Depending on the rate of transmission in the community, we may undertake additional precautions when providing services to exempted, or unvaccinated clients.

What if I get COVID-19, or my carer does?

Members of our team have gone through specialist training to be able to continue providing essential services to those who may be isolating with suspected, or confirmed, COVID-19. This will be coordinated as usual, but in liaison with Lauren, our COVID-19 Project Lead.

We also anticipate that the primary support or carer of our clients may become unwell and may not be able to provide their usual level of support. In these instances please let us know, as we could look at additional support, or short term alternatives.

What do you require me to do?

We are encouraging all clients to get vaccinated and where you have concerns, discuss them with your medical practitioner. Our team members are dedicated to providing our usual services while taking all necessary steps to keep you and them safe, so this will be a bit different as they will be wearing face masks, and for some services, they will be asking for proof of vaccination. We do appreciate your patience as we may ask you for proof more than once, or we may request to change your service time, or who provides that service.

I know from our team members, that one of the most difficult things for them is when they arrive and see your disappointment that they are not your usual team member. I appreciate that having the same person, who knows you and who you trust, is at the cornerstone of our services, but at this time I ask for your flexibility and patience. Of course we still need your feedback if something goes wrong, or where we could improve, so please don't hesitate to let your coordinator know.

I understand the benefit of a regular in person meeting with your coordinator, but during this time I do ask for your flexibility to do this over the phone, or online where possible.

In summary, please be assured that we are taking all steps to maximise the safety of our clients and team members while continuing to provide your usual services. I will be sending out updates and encourage those of you with email addresses to provide them to your coordinator, otherwise you will receive updates by mail.

As always, should you have any other questions or comments, I welcome them.

Kind regards,

Maria

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