



Australian Government

Department of Health and Ageing

Dear Approved Provider

Risk Management for Emergency Events

With many States already experiencing high temperatures and bushfires, and a heightened risk of other significant emergency events such as severe storms, floods or cyclones, an increased focus on emergency preparedness is warranted at this time of year. The purpose of this advice is to raise your awareness of recommended preparations for residential aged care services.

As agreed by the Council of Australian Governments in 2003, and further clarified in 2009 through the *Australian Emergency Management Arrangements* paper endorsed by the Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management, each level of government has responsibility within its own jurisdiction. This responsibility includes emergency planning, preparedness and mitigation in relation to: land; property and the environment; assets and infrastructure; agencies and programmes.

In preparing for the high risk period, all levels of government are working collaboratively with State Emergency Services and Country Fire Authorities to mitigate risk and raise community awareness. State and Territory Offices of the Department of Health and Ageing have been and are continuing to work with State Health and other relevant authorities to plan for broader community response to significant emergency events, including for the residential aged care sector.

The February 2009 bushfires in Victoria, which saw residents in 12 aged care facilities evacuated to over 23 residential aged care facilities, four hospitals and a number of family homes, highlighted the vulnerability of the aged care sector and the need for detailed planning. Aged care facilities that were evacuated during the Victorian fires faced a number of issues including the identification of alternate accommodation and availability of appropriate transport to move frail care recipients, when usual modes of transport, like ambulances, were not available.

New national fire danger ratings have being developed and released to the public, which recommend a response for each of the fire danger levels. Further information about the national fire danger rating can be obtained from the fire authority website in your State.

Responsibilities of Approved Providers

As an approved provider you would know that Accreditation Standard 4.6 (Fire, Security and other Emergencies) requires all aged care services to have emergency management plans and protocols in place. It is necessary that you review your emergency management plans so that

they are up to date and take into consideration significant emergency events encompassing whole communities, such as bushfires, cyclones, floods or storm damage.

In updating your emergency management plans, you must consider that significant emergency events pose unique issues for operators of aged care services, including the risks associated with relocating frail older people. Any decision to relocate or evacuate must be conducted in line with your facility's emergency management plan.

What you need to consider in preparing for an emergency event

It is important to recognise that local and regional emergency and fire services have differing practices in preparing for and responding to significant emergency events. With this in mind there are a number of key considerations for residential aged care approved providers in preparing for the current high risk season. These must include but should not be limited to:

- contact local emergency services to seek advice and ensure that they are aware of your facilities, their size and location, and the particular needs of the residents. Provide contact details of your facility and key personnel to the emergency services, and ensure that all key personnel have access to contact details for local emergency services;
- liaise with local emergency services to determine the seriousness of any emergency situation and level of risk posed to your facility and care recipients;
- liaise with your local hospital/s to ensure an integration of emergency management plans for both services (this is particularly important in rural or remote locations);
- during any period of high risk, ensure that key personnel regularly monitor emergency broadcasts and the media for localised warnings and advice;
- develop an appropriate emergency management plan which considers the needs of vulnerable care recipients during significant fire or flood events. This must include options or arrangements for alternative accommodation;
- know when to activate emergency management plans, and make timely/informed decisions, which may culminate in the relocation or evacuation of the facility;
- continue to deliver appropriate care, which may require sourcing additional staff or volunteers;
- discuss with care recipients, family and staff, emergency management plans as well as keeping them informed during any emergency situation;
- develop a plan for post trauma counselling for care recipients and staff; and
- liaise with local agencies providing recovery and other relevant services.

As part of the emergency planning process, you are expected to explore and document alternative accommodation options and where possible, make arrangements at a local/regional level. The Department of Health and Ageing will assist approved providers with options when sufficient alternative accommodation is not available for evacuating or relocating care recipients. For example, the Department of Health and Ageing will be able to help you identify aged care services or other facilities that have the capacity to accommodate care recipients.

In relation to transport options during an emergency event, aged care facilities need to plan ahead and recognise that ambulance services may be fully occupied responding to emergency calls. Therefore, multiple alternate means of transport such as buses, vans or cars need to be considered well in advance, including availability at short notice and 24 hour contact details.

In the event of a catastrophic fire danger rating in your area or an emergency situation where facilities are relocating residents, officers from the Department of Health and Ageing may contact you to:

- ensure that you know of the risk and that your facility, care recipients and staff are ready to respond to any threat; and
- ascertain the potential of your facility to provide emergency accommodation to relocated care recipients from at risk facilities.

Further advice

For advice in a significant emergency event contact your local emergency services or state fire authority. At this point in time, on general matters and access to accommodation information the Department of Health and Ageing can be contacted, during business hours via the Aged Care Complaints Investigation Scheme on 1800 550 552. In Victoria and New South Wales the Department of Health and Ageing has dedicated Emergency Response numbers, aged care services in Victoria can contact 1800 078 709 and aged care services in New South Wales can contact 1800 852 649.

Yours sincerely

'Authorised for electronic transmission'

Carolyn Smith
First Assistant Secretary
Office of Aged Care Quality and Compliance
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