

Free COVID-19 resources and proven strategies to support RACF residents and their families during an outbreak

Residential aged care facilities (RACFs) around Australia have had to act fast to keep residents safe during recent COVID-19 outbreaks. All have found it challenging to share critical communication keeping concerned residents and their families informed of:

- ▶ ongoing developments at the facility
- ▶ available supports, especially if there's a desire to transfer a resident to the family home
- ▶ residents' health and wellbeing.

The Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN) and Elder Rights Advocacy (ERA) can help you communicate with residents and their families, and give them a voice during an active COVID-19 outbreak or lockdown, by sharing proven strategies and communication tools with you.

COVID-19 Communications Toolkit to help take the pressure off

OPAN's COVID-19 Communications Toolkit provides a range of resources to support your residents and their families: fact sheets, letters, posters, videos, scripts and postcards. Some items include text you can adapt.

Fact sheets

- ▶ *'COVID-19 checklist to plan your communication'* – a checklist for providers to help you get an effective communications plan in place to support residents and their families.
- ▶ *'Requirements for bringing loved ones home during COVID-19'* – information for families wishing to take a resident out of your residential aged care facility.
- ▶ *'Know your rights during COVID-19'* – information for residents and their families about the Charter of Aged Care Rights and aged care advocates.
- ▶ *'Videos to help you explain the COVID-19 outbreak to your residents'* – link to Dr Norman Swan video explaining facility lockdown to residents, plus a drafted script so you can record your own version using someone your residents know and trust.
- ▶ *'A thank you note to reassure your residents during COVID-19'* – drafted text for a note to residents from your facility when you're in lockdown.

Mailings and handouts

- ▶ *Letter to residents and their families or representatives* – from OPAN and ERA, it explains aged care advocacy and who they can contact for support. Send it out with the *'Know your rights during COVID-19'* fact sheet.
- ▶ *'You may have noticed some changes around here'* – A5 postcard that residents can take to their room. You could also place it on their meal trays. It explains facility lockdown and what residents can do if they're worried.

A3 poster

- ▶ *'You may have noticed some changes around here'* – explains facility changes and restrictions to residents and what they can do if they're worried.

Videos

- ▶ *RACF outbreak explainer video* – Dr Norman Swan explains facility changes and restrictions to residents. Available with closed captions.
- ▶ *Advocacy explainer video* – Dr Norman Swan introduces older persons advocacy.
- ▶ *Older Persons COVID-19 Support Line info video* – Dr Norman Swan introduces the Support Line. Available with closed captions.

Multilingual support

- ▶ Dr Norman Swan videos above with closed captions in English, Greek, Italian, Chinese (Simplified) and Vietnamese.
- ▶ Information on the Older Persons COVID-19 Support Line in 64 languages.



Strategies developed from previous COVID-19 outbreaks

RACFs have faced considerable communications challenges during COVID-19 outbreaks to date. So, in addition to OPAN's COVID-19 Communications Kit, we've collected proven strategies you can use to reassure and improve communication with residents and their families. OPAN and ERA recommend you take the suggestions below on board if your facility has a COVID-19 breakout and has to lock down.

We've developed a checklist to help you plan your own strategy. Refer to the '*COVID-19 checklist to plan your communication*' fact sheet.

Be available and keep communication open

- ▶ Consider having a dedicated, on-the-ground communications team to deal with all family enquiries or issues as they come up.
- ▶ Ask family members how frequently they'd like updates on the facility and their loved one. Daily? Every second day? When health status changes?
- ▶ Consider engaging a Crisis Communications Advisor.
- ▶ Provide daily email updates to all families detailing changes to processes regarding food, laundry, infection controls, staffing levels – even if there's nothing to report. It's important to keep families in the loop.

- ▶ If a significant number of residents and families require advocacy, group Zoom meetings are a safe space where families can raise issues and gain information.
- ▶ Consider sending a condolence message to the family of any resident who passes away as a result of COVID-19.
- ▶ Create and communicate a process for returning the belongings of residents who have passed away, and stick to that process.

Facilitate visitors and contact where possible

- ▶ Schedule window visits for family members.
- ▶ Issue all residents with smartphones or tablets so they can have regular communication with loved ones.

And don't forget

- ▶ Get a laundry management plan ready for when infection control or quarantine measures are in force. Disruptions cause a lot of anxiety for residents and their families.
- ▶ Appoint a go-to person inside your facility who advocates can contact to escalate systemic issues to management for resolution. While it's important you also deal with the issues residents and their families raise, it's critical that advocates can fast-track systemic issues for speedy resolution.

OPAN is funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health. Our role is to deliver services through a network of service delivery organisations (SDOs) based in the states and territories. In Victoria, the SDO is ERA. ERA provides free, confidential, independent aged care advocacy and information to older people receiving Commonwealth-funded aged care services, their families and representatives.

Contact OPAN or Elder Rights Advocacy (ERA) to find out more about COVID-19 resources and support for your residents and their families.

 Freecall **1800 700 600**
6am–10pm AEST, 7 days



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