



17th March 2020

Dear Caring Families,

Re: CatholicCare Social Services Hunter-Manning (an agency of the Catholic Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle) - position on the Novel coronavirus (COVID-19)

CatholicCare Social Services Hunter-Manning is closely monitoring the development of the coronavirus (COVID-19) situation and is committed to following guidance provided by the relevant authorities, NSW Health and the Australian Governments Department of Health.

The safety and wellbeing of our clients, staff, carers and volunteers is our paramount consideration and we are implementing a number of measures to ensure that we are responding appropriately to the situation as it unfolds.

Self-isolation for people returning from overseas

From midnight Monday 16th March 2020, people who have returned from anywhere overseas, or have been in close contact with a confirmed case of coronavirus, are required to self-isolate for 14 days. If you develop symptoms including a fever, cough and runny nose you should immediately and urgently seek medical attention. This information sheet should be read in conjunction with the [What you need to know](#) and [Isolation guidance](#) information sheets. If you do need to self-isolate could you please let your primary CCSS contact person know.

Preventative measures

Practising good hand and sneeze/cough hygiene is the best defence against most viruses. You should:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water, before and after eating, and after going to the toilet.
- Cover your mouth when coughing and sneezing, dispose of tissues, and use alcohol-based hand sanitiser.



- If unwell, stay home and where possible, avoid contact with others (stay more than 1.5 metres away from people).

Social distancing

Consistent with the Australian Governments recommendations regarding social distancing, we have made the following decisions:

- **Group Carer Training** - all group carer training is cancelled until further notice. Training will be delivered on-line where applicable.
- **Non-essential face-to-face meetings** – all non-essential face-to-face meetings are to be cancelled and discussions will be held by using other mediums such as Zoom, teleconference, SharePoint, email/written circular resolution.

As you are aware, CatholicCare Social Services is funded to provide services and supports to people in need across our communities. I understand that in response to the unfolding COVID-19 situation, there may be some carers who do not want staff entering their homes. Whilst we will do everything we can to respect those wishes, I would like to remind you that part of receiving funding from the Department of Communities and Justice means we have legislated obligations to support children, young people and families who are part of the statutory out of home care system.

To ensure we can meet these obligations and continue to provide our carers with ongoing support, we are temporarily implementing a number of alternative measures that may help reduce exposure to COVID-19. These measures include:

- Care support staff offering to meet at alternative locations, such as parks where children can play whilst staff and carers have their discussions.
- Offering caring families whom we support phone calls as the preferred mode of contact over the next two weeks. This will be reviewed weekly by members of the leadership team in consultation with the WHS Manager of the Diocese.
- Conduct child sighting visits via technological platforms such as FaceTime or Zoom
- Ensuring that any face-to-face visits involve the absolute minimum of staff numbers attending to respond to the presenting issues.
- Ensuring that appropriate risk assessments and risk treatments are conducted and implemented during family time visits. It is very difficult to make a blanket rule in situations



where we are dealing with families who are desperate to see their children who may not currently be living with them (as one example). To this, we need to determine the risk and proceed with caution and compassion. If the risk is too great, we will postpone these visits.

I will advise the Department of Communities and Justice and the Office of the Children's Guardian of our revised visitation process. Once I have notified the Directors of these agencies, CatholicCare's Care Team Managers will maintain ongoing dialogue with the Department at a local level.

CatholicCare Social Services and the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle are revising business continuity plans to respond to what is a rapidly developing situation that has the potential to impact our staff, services and clients. To this end, CatholicCare has established a business continuity team that meets daily. This team includes:

- Gary Christensen – Director
- Rob Dawson – Manager Strategy and Engagement
- MaryAnne Kerrins – General Operations Manager
- David Robson – Quality and Compliance Manager
- Carlie Sazdanoff – HR Business Partner
- Wayne Carmen – Safety and Wellness Business Partner

I understand that the unfolding situation in relation to COVID-19 may cause some stress and anxiety. Please understand that we are doing everything we can to follow the guidelines issued by the relevant authorities. If you would like to discuss anything I have outlined above, please feel free to contact me by email gchristensen@catholiccare.org.au.

Regards,



Gary Christensen
Director
CatholicCare Social Services Hunter-Manning

