

19 July 2021

Dear Residents, Families and Visitors

Late last month, National Cabinet announced that the COVID-19 vaccination of residential aged care workers will become mandatory by 17 September 2021 meaning workers must have received at least the first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine by this time.

Crowley supports vaccination as it has been shown it is the best protection against becoming unwell with COVID-19. Ensuring as many Australians as possible are vaccinated offers greater protection not only to residents of aged care, but to all of us and our families.

The mandate applies to all care staff, allied health professionals, administration staff, kitchen, cleaning, laundry, maintenance and garden staff. Currently Home Care staff are not included in the directive, however Crowley will continue to strongly recommend and encourage all staff to seek a COVID-19 vaccination.

We are still waiting for more details on what exemptions will be permitted under the new mandate but anticipate that the process will be similar to the one that is in place for Influenza Vaccinations requiring the completion of a government form by a Doctor.

Improved Vaccine Availability

Access to a vaccine has been a hurdle for many Australian's including staff who work in Aged Care. Originally eligible under 1A of the Government's national vaccination roll out, staff in aged care were to have been vaccinated by Government contractors onsite in March. Unfortunately, this did not occur.

The Government decision to expand the vaccine eligibility criteria to include subsequent phases of the rollout before vaccinating those under phase 1A, along with the well-publicised vaccine supply issues and changed advice on which vaccine was recommended to certain age groups, has had the unfortunate consequence of making it difficult for many staff to secure an appointment to receive a vaccine.

As such we welcome the news that vaccine supply issues are being addressed and the announcement that residential aged care workers will be able to access the Pfizer vaccine as the available supply increases, meaning staff will finally have access to the COVID-19 vaccine recommended by the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) for their age. An additional benefit of the Pfizer vaccine is that an individual can be fully vaccinated within 21 days.

Onsite Vaccination Clinics

Every year Crowley provides onsite Influenza Vaccination clinics for both Residents and Staff. With qualified vaccinators on staff we are able to vaccinate eligible Residents and Staff with the influenza vaccine. This process is approved by the Department of Health and the benefit is we can address vaccinations for our people with speed and efficiency.

Being able to follow a similar process and facilitate onsite COVID-19 vaccinations for staff is something Crowley has been trying to provide since March, either using our own COVID-19 Vaccine qualified staff or a suitable contractor. To date we have been unsuccessful however we continue to pursue.

Vaccination Status

You will all by now be aware of the media attention put on aged care providers and their staff in relation to COVID-19 vaccination. Whilst most people understand the difficulties the sector has had in obtaining a vaccination there have been some unfortunate instances in which our staff have been approached by visitors and been asked to divulge their personal vaccination status and that of their colleagues.

This is a sad turn of events putting even more pressure on staff who have been trying to access vaccines but unable to do so. Particularly as staff in aged care have been at the front line of this pandemic for over 18 months doing their utmost to protect our residents. Often making lifestyle decisions in the best interests of others, not themselves. Given the privacy and mental health implications for staff this information is not something that our staff are required to, or should, divulge.

For your awareness aged care has an extensive range of compliance obligations in regard to COVID-19 which includes vaccination reporting. In addition, each week Crowley reports on the total number of staff who have received one or both doses of a COVID-19 vaccine to the Department of Health. Starting on 27 July 2021 providers will also be required to report the total number of residents who have received one or both doses of a COVID-19 vaccine to the Department of Health. The information provided does not identify any individual Resident or Staff member.

We have acknowledged many times that this pandemic is an unprecedented challenge for all of us. Pandemic fatigue is very real for everyone. It is with this in mind I implore all visitors to treat our staff with respect and kindness, they too have families and concerns outside of Crowley, and yet they have worked tirelessly to care for our residents and ensure they remain safe and well.

Crowley runs 24 hours per day 7 days a week 365 days per year. We rely on these staff to continue to turn up and provide the high level of care and services the residents and clients need. Many industries including aged care nationally is experiencing difficulties with staffing never seen before. We must all support and encourage our staff to ensure they feel supported and strong enough to continue their invaluable work.

Finally, and as always, I would like to extend my thanks to everyone who continues to work with us to keep everyone safe and well during this global pandemic. It has, without doubt, been a long 18 months with many ups and downs however I am constantly amazed and heartened by the generosity, compassion, understanding and resilience shown by many in our Crowley family.

As more information is available on the mandatory COVID-19 vaccination process we will keep you informed.

Regards



Michael Penhey
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER