

Important update on COVID-19 and the impact on OPG services

23 March 2020

The global COVID-19 pandemic is unparalleled and OPG shares your very real concerns about the health of our clients, our staff, families, friends and stakeholders. The pandemic is of course first and foremost a humanitarian crisis, but it is also creating unprecedented challenges for organisations in Australia, so we want to update you on what this means for OPG.

Firstly, we want to reiterate that our primary focus in these uncertain times is on continuing to support our clients whilst also keeping our staff safe. We are already enacting our business continuity plans across the agency to ensure that we can continue to provide all of our key services for as long as possible. We are also monitoring and acting on the guidance provided by the Queensland Department of Health, as well as the other government agencies and the WHO.

As much of our work involves interacting with people, OPG has made some key changes to our work practices to protect both our clients and our staff. To help minimise the spread of the virus, we have already implemented the following:

- Reviewed and restricted our visiting arrangements with some facilities, such as Residential Aged Care facilities and private hostels/boardings houses with level 3 accreditation under the *Residential Services (Accreditation) Act 2002*
- Instigated processes to ensure our staff do not visit a facility or a home where they are at increased risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus, by ensuring staff call before the visit to assess whether it is appropriate for a visit to continue
- Limited face to face contact with clients for the foreseeable future, except where circumstances deem a visit necessary
- Established processes to continue exploring how we can best utilise other methods to meet the needs of clients

In anticipation of future staff shortages due to sickness or caring arrangements, we are also considering how we can best prioritise our workloads to ensure our most vulnerable clients aren't placed at significant risk.

Regardless of the procedures we put in place to protect our clients and staff, be assured that we are still available to respond to issues, concerns and advocacy requests by phone and email.

To meet best practice standards around social distancing, we are also limiting face to face meetings with our stakeholders. Where we cannot meet in person, we are exploring other options such as telephone, email and Skype. For now, we are also postponing all community education sessions.

When do I need to contact OPG for COVID-19 related decisions for clients under the guardianship of the Public Guardian?

We know that at this time there may be a lot of uncertainty around when you do and do not need to contact OPG around COVID-19 related decisions for adults under guardianship of the Public Guardian, so we wish to provide the following information as guidance:

- OPG does not need to approve or consent to any COVID-19 plans for clients, including service-specific emergency/disaster business continuity plans.
- Where urgent actions are needed to ensure the safety and wellbeing of clients, service providers do not need to contact OPG to obtain prior consent - they should take the necessary actions and can advise OPG at the earliest possible opportunity. This would include limiting community access and self-isolating where recommended by Queensland Health.
- Where a client falls into categories defined by Queensland Health for testing, assessment or treatment for COVID-19, service providers should assist clients to do so. Service providers do not need to contact OPG for consent. Health providers should follow the normal consent process for procedures.

This is an ever-evolving situation and there are many unknowns at this time, but we can assure you that OPG is monitoring the situation closely, following government advice and implementing additional measures as needed to continue supporting our clients and staff.

We will endeavour to keep this page updated should any of the above information change.