



# ACIPC

Australasian College  
for Infection Prevention and Control

## Infection control college supports Royal Commission's call for more expertise in aged care

### Media release 8<sup>th</sup> October 2020

The Australasian College of Infection Prevention and Control's President, Associate Professor Philip Russo has issued the following statement.

What the COVID pandemic has demonstrated is the great benefits for patient care of strong infection control, and the serious risks to patients when infection control falters.

The Australasian College of Infection Prevention and Control welcomes and supports the recommendation by the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety that the Australian Government should arrange for the deployment of accredited infection, prevention and control experts into residential aged care homes.

The Royal Commission puts a focus on the need for stronger measures on infection prevention and control in its [Aged care and COVID-19: a special report](#), released on 1 October 2020.

It has recommended that the Australian Government report to Parliament by no later than 1 December 2020 on the implementation of its recommendations which include:

- All residential aged care homes should have one or more trained infection control officers as a condition of accreditation. The training requirements for these officers should be set by the aged care advisory body, proposed by the Royal Commission.
- The Australian Government should arrange with the States and Territories to deploy accredited infection prevention and control experts into residential aged care homes to provide training, assist with the preparation of outbreak management plans and assist with outbreaks.

The report's recommendations are of direct importance to ACIPC members and to the College's role in meeting the needs and challenges described by the Royal Commission. ACIPC board director, Kathy Dempsey, who is with the NSW Clinical Excellence Commission, was an expert witness at a Commission hearing. She explained the process by which infection control and prevention specialists are accredited. There are currently 63 credentialed infection control and prevention specialists across Australia, mainly in major hospitals.

The Federal Government has announced that as part of increased funding to support the pandemic response in aged care, providers "must have one or more trained infection control officers to improve infection control management", a measure we welcome.

The College strongly supports measures to ensure that residential aged care homes have rigorous infection control protocols and staff. Our past experience with influenza and other infectious disease episodes in aged care have already revealed an endemic and ongoing need for more effective infection control, and the lack of onsite expertise. COVID-19 has elevated the gravity and urgency of this need.



ACIPC has since the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic responded to the rising demand for education of IPC staff. Since the start of the year, the College has conducted 6 training courses for 170 workers in aged care. There are currently another 5 short courses organised for the sector for 178 staff, with the potential to provide additional short courses if needed. A Masterclass addressing high level issues in Aged Care Infection Prevention and Control Management including but not restricted to COVID-19 management will be available soon. Since the start of the year, 13 members have been credentialled / recredentialled and a further 41 have completed, and 234 are currently undertaking the College course Foundations of Infection Prevention and Control, which is a pathway to becoming a Primary Credentialled Infection Control Professional.

As the Commission report says, there is nothing more important to help providers prepare for and respond to COVID-19 outbreaks than access to high level infection prevention and control expertise.

Providers of aged care are required under existing Standards to minimise infection-related risks by implementing 'standard and transmission-based precautions to prevent and control infection'. But for COVID-19, there are particular challenges associated with infection control in aged care homes. These challenges are compounded by the lack of onsite infection prevention and control expertise or where external oversight of Infection control may not have been possible.

The Commission report stated that based on the findings of expert reports into the impact of COVID on aged care homes it is apparent that high-level infection control expertise is needed by aged care homes:

- to assist with the preparation and implementation of outbreak management plans to provide training
- to staff on the use of PPE and infection prevention and control
- to provide assistance on day one of an outbreak.

The Commission said that the Australian Government should make arrangements with the States for easy access by providers to the accredited specialists. This should be able to be achieved on a regional basis.

While it is true, as the Australian Government submitted, that 'infection control specialists are organised and engaged by the public health units of each State and Territory', the Commission considered that the Australian Government, as the government responsible for residential aged care facilities, should be working closely with the States to make infection control expertise available to the sector.

"We accept that there are clearly limits to what the relatively small number of accredited experts can contribute through their direct involvement in the aged care sector."

"The best approach may be to use their expertise in training and mentoring roles to increase capacity in the aged care sector," the Commission report states.

The Commission also inquired into the issue of training for personal protective equipment. This was a matter that requires urgent attention by the Australian Government, aged care providers and those responsible for the content of the Certificate III. Providing this training should be a core responsibility of providers.

"Providers need to appreciate the risks associated with COVID-19. While the tragic events in NSW and Victoria may have assisted unaffected providers to learn about the need for infection prevention and control expertise, this need must be made absolutely plain in the national aged care COVID-19 plan," the Commission stated.

Finally, providers and employers should strongly support their staff to undertake infection prevention training and credentialing where appropriate. In the short term, the College is in the process of setting



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up an Aged Care Special Interest Group to provide resources, information, networking and support to those working in aged care.

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