Wednesday 15 July 2020

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) Update

Victorian private and not-for-profit aged care sector

As we all try and keep up to date with the restrictions in place due to COVID 19, as nurses and carers we have the added issue of particular restrictions because of where we work, who we care for, as well as where we live or travel to work from.

The residential aged care sector is a Commonwealth Government responsibility. While there is an evolving suite of information and support for those working in the public sector (as this is developed between the Victorian Government and unions, including ANMF) it is far more difficult to find information that is specific to the private and not-for-profit residential aged care sector.

This update will not and cannot provide all the answers, and today's answers may not be the right answer tomorrow, but ANMF will continue to try and keep members updated as things change.

Wearing of PPE

Nurses and carers who work in residential facilities or provide home care support across metropolitan Melbourne and the Mitchell Shire will be required to wear surgical masks following recommendations from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC). An additional four million masks will be made available from the Commonwealth's stockpile to aged care and home care providers in the areas with restrictions including metropolitan Melbourne and Mitchell Shire.

The Commonwealth have also announced a large deployment of up to 250,000 surgical masks, 250,000 gowns, 250,000 face shields/goggles and supplies of hand sanitiser is currently underway for services in these areas.

Further information is available in the Commonwealth Government's media release 'Face masks required for aged care workers in Melbourne hotspots' https://bit.ly/2ZsMaMK

The State Government is also making PPE available through its resources. Further information is available in the following documents:

- *Access to personal protective equipment: information for residential aged care facilities in Victoria* https://bit.ly/3fv1dLn
- *What personal protective equipment to use and when: residential aged care: Coronavirus (COVID-19) update (17 June)* https://bit.ly/38VB0Da Information includes when PPE is required, options to secure PPE, and in which circumstances various PPE options should be used.

ANMF will be working on your behalf to ensure that adequate and correct PPE is made available to you at your work.

Working two or more jobs

ANMF is aware that some aged care providers are directing nurses and carers not to work in more than one workplace, or for more than one employer. Some are going as far as asserting that a failure to comply with that directions will lose you your job. This is said to be for occupational health and safety reasons.

ANMF knows that, to make ends meet, many members work multiple jobs. There is no strong evidence to suggest that this poses a particular threat to residents or co-workers. Were this to become a government directive as part of COVID restrictions then we would need to work with members and providers to manage this, preferably before any such direction was made.

This was raised by ANMF with the Federal Minister for Aged Care Richard Colbeck, who disappointingly considered it an industrial dispute we could take to the Fair Work Commission. It is far more complex and far reaching than the impact on an individual employee, as important as that is.

ANMF is discussing this with the State Minister for Ageing Luke Donellan's office and is hopeful that we can establish discussions between the ANMF, the state and federal departments, and aged care provider representatives to manage this into the immediate future. As members would recognise, the flow on effect of limiting a nurse or carer to one employer is not only a massive hit to the income of already low paid members, but will impact on other aged care providers capacity to fill their rosters.

If you are issued with a direction like this – contact the ANMF via the Member Assistance online inquiry form https://www.anmfvic.asn.au/memberassistance

When am I not supposed to attend for work?

You should not come to work if you:

1. have a fever

2. have a symptom, even a minor symptom, of respiratory illness, such as a cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose or nasal congestion

3. Are in quarantine, such as where you have been in contact with someone with COVID-19 and you were not wearing PPE

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Returning to work after quarantine

Staff who do not develop COVID-19 symptoms while in quarantine can return to work without a medical clearance. Testing for COVID-19 is not necessary.

Am I entitled to be paid if I am off work due to COVID restrictions?

If you are unable to attend work due to illness or injury, and have a sick leave entitlement, then you are entitled to sick leave, a part of your personal leave entitlement. However, casual employees do not have a personal leave entitlement.

While some aged care employers have been more generous, including BUPA who have provided special paid leave, merely being suspected of having COVID without being unwell may not entitle you to use sick leave, unless you are actually sick.

If you believe that you have contracted COVID-19 through work, you can (and ANMF strongly encourages members to) make a WorkCover claim. The long-terms effects on your health are not yet clear, and simply taking personal leave or special leave may not protect you against future health problems or loss of earnings.

ANMF is seeking alternate forms of support for nurses and carers who cannot attend work due to COVID-19, consistent with the suport the State Government has provided to public sector employees and the private acute sector has provided to its employees. ANMF will update members as more information becomes available.

In addition, we are calling on all Victorian private aged care providers to immediately cease making cuts to nursing and carer hours. See the ANMF media release https://bit.ly/38U88uS

What's happening with the aged care retention bonus?

Federal ANMF has sought clarification from the Department of Health after aged care members reported confusion about the status of their employer's application for the COVID-19 workforce retention bonus.

In response the Department of Health said it had extended the deadline for the applications from 20 July to 31 July.

It will also contact all aged care providers over the next fortnight which have not applied for the workforce retention bonus on behalf of their nurses, carers or other eligible staff.

Applications must be completed at approved provider level meaning some facility managers may not be aware of where the process is at for their organisation.

The first payments are scheduled to commence this week to providers who must pass the payments on to eligible staff. Payments will continue in batches.

You will only receive the payments if your employer makes an application. Use our template letter to write to your employer asking for written confirmation that they have made an application for the bonus on your behalf.

Further information

- Download ANMF's template letter to write to your employer via https://bit.ly/agedcareletter
- The Department of Health *Workforce retention bonus grant – residential care and home care'* fact sheet (5 June 2020) https://bit.ly/2zjXSPj
- *Federal ANMF information sheet: retention bonus* via https://bit.ly/anmfinfo-aged-care-support

Got a colleague not receiving ANMF emails?

If you have an ANMF colleague who is not receiving these newsflash emails, please pass this on and let them know they can re-subscribe via https://www.anmfvic.asn.au/resubscribe