

## My parents are in aged care, what should I do to keep them safe during the coronavirus pandemic?

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About one-in-six active COVID-19 cases in Victoria are currently linked to aged care homes. (AAP: Daniel Pockett)

With COVID-19 cases sweeping through aged care homes in Victoria, [and NSW determined to prevent another outbreak like Newmarch House](#), many families are grappling with difficult choices concerning the care and future of their loved ones.

We consulted advocates and experts about what to consider when making these decisions, and the options available for keeping family members in good health during the pandemic.

### Are my parents safe in aged care?

Aged care providers are responsible under federal law and the [Aged Care Charter of Rights](#) for keeping their residents safe.

The providers are monitored by the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (ACQSC) — a federal regulator, which investigates complaints and conducts spot checks of facilities.

The ACQSC said it's using its "full range of regulatory powers" to make sure aged care homes are doing the right thing during the pandemic, but some advocates say the system is reactive, and

nowhere near adequate to keep residents safe.

"Putting vulnerable people together with people exposed to COVID-19, that makes them unsafe," Paul Versteeg from the Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association (CPSA) said.



Age care providers are legally responsible for residents' safety, with federal oversight.

*(ABC News: Kristian Silva)*

But Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN) CEO Craig Gear disagrees.

"I think they should feel safe in the sense that there are really good people there trying to do the best in some really difficult circumstances," he said.

Mr Gear said it was important for people to continue talking to their relatives and communicating with providers.

"Asking the providers themselves to give evidence they're continuing to deliver care in line with the person's care plan," he said.

"That's really important that families be allowed to actually ask those questions and ask the residents themselves what they are experiencing at the moment."

Since the beginning of the year, industry bodies have established [a code of practice for visitors](#), and for [managing the Victorian outbreak](#), to establish some consistency across the board.

## Can I take my parent out of aged care during this crisis?

Yes, you can.

Residents are eligible to take unlimited [emergency leave until September 30](#), without losing their place at their home.

The peak body, LASA, said this included residents of aged care homes in Victoria, if they have tested negative for COVID-19.

"LASA would suggest that residents using emergency leave undertake 14 days of self-isolation in the family home, with close monitoring," a spokesperson said in a statement.

The ABC did not receive specific details from the Victorian or Federal Government as to what, if any, restrictions are in place for residents wanting to leave homes in lockdown areas.

The Federal Government said in a statement that leaving aged care for a family home should be done in consultation with the resident's GP and family.

"Residents should also discuss their service's COVID-19 readmission policy with their [provider] before making a decision to take leave," the Federal Health Department said in a statement.

LASA said residents would still have to pay the basic daily fee, the means tested care fees and daily accommodation costs, but the Government would also still provide the aged care subsidy to providers, and residents would not pay any additional fees to keep their place.

### Who to contact for further information:

Organisation	Phone
<a href="#">Older Persons Advocacy Network</a>	1800 237 981
<a href="#">Federal Government Older Persons COVID-19 support line</a>	1800 171 866
<a href="#">Victorian Health and Human Services</a>	1300 650 172
<a href="#">Myagedcare.gov.au COVID-19 support</a>	1800 200 422

## Would it be wise to go into an aged care facility right now?

If you're not yet in full time care and you're in a position to put it off, some advocates believe you should.

"I don't think it's a good time to go into aged care. Try and get a high-level home care package," Lynda Saltarelli from advocacy group Aged Care Crisis said.

Ms Saltarelli said the Aged Care Royal Commission and a number of previous inquiries had identified the growing casualisation of the aged care workforce as a potential problem.

Much of the spread of COVID-19 in Victorian nursing homes has been attributed to aged care staff working in multiple residences — [a practice Government is now trying to limit](#).

"It's just so expected. We're not surprised at all," she said.

"If you can avoid it, avoid it," Paul Versteegen agreed.

If an elderly person waiting to go into care is currently receiving a home care package, that funding will continue until they have accepted a place in a residential home.

That might mean rejecting a highly sought-after spot in a home, as there's no official way to defer an offer until a time that suits you.

But there may be a chance you can negotiate with the provider.

"Perhaps you could cut a deal [with a provider] because occupancy has fallen," Mr Versteegen said.

The occupancy rate in 2018-19 was 89.4 per cent, down from 97.1 per cent in the early 2000s.

Earlier this month, a survey commissioned by the Aged Care Royal Commission revealed 80 percent of older Australians want to remain in their own homes.

Only 25 per cent of older people said they would prefer to live in an aged care facility.

### Victoria COVID-19 snapshot

- Melbourne's 14-day average: 9.9
- Regional Victoria's 14-day average: 0.3
- Current active cases: 206
- Active cases in regional Victoria: 2
- Active cases in healthcare workers: 26
- Active cases linked to aged care: 58
- Deaths: 809
- Cases in hospital: 16
- Intensive care patients: 2
- Tests since pandemic began: More than 2.78 million
- Confirmed cases so far: 20,237

*Updated Wednesday October 7*

[Latest Victorian Government info](#)

## Who's making sure aged care has what they need to manage a COVID-19 outbreak?

Until this week, the responsibility has fallen to the providers themselves.

[Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer Alison McMillan told the ABC](#) the Federal Government has been working with the ACQSC to provide "advice, education, training and PPE to all privately run and operated residential aged care facilities across Australia".

But the peak body for aged care providers, Leading Age Services Australia (LASA) said action and funding was "simply not moving quick enough".





The Federal Government has since established a response centre to coordinate and expand resources to tackle the virus in Victoria's aged care services. (AAP: Daniel Pockett)

"Currently, restrictions for access into aged care facilities where vulnerable older Australians reside in known COVID-19 hotspots simply do not go far enough," the LASA said in a statement.

**"Access to sufficient supplies of personal protective equipment from the national stockpile remains an ongoing issue."**

This week, the [Victorian Aged Care Response Centre was established](#) by the Commonwealth and Victorian governments to bring together state and federal agencies to manage the pandemic across facilities in that state.

## **What other options do I have?**

While the desire to get your loved one out of residential aged care may be natural, arranging a way to get that care at home may be complicated.

If a person previously had a home care package before going into aged care, they won't simply be able to reclaim it if they leave residential care.

Mr Versteegen from the CPSA said that once a package is given up, applicants have to go back on the waiting list.

More than 100,000 older Australians are on the list for a home care package, and wait times are up to two years for the highest levels of care.

But Craig Gear said there may be some funding out there to access emergency home care.

"We're talking to Government about how do we access the extra support for where people need to do that," he said.

"If they need a high level of care that may take some planning and it may [depend on] what the local availability of services are and how to access it."

Aged Care Minister Richard Colbeck told the ABC the Federal Government was providing support for families who want to take their relatives out of residential aged care on an individual basis, but he would not commit to increasing the number of homecare packages across the board.

### **What you need to know about coronavirus:**

- [The symptoms](#)
- [The number of cases in Australia](#)
- [Tracking Australia's vaccine rollout](#)
- [Global cases, deaths and testing rates](#)