

Paid Leave for Aged Care Workers During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Overview

The Australian Government recognises Australia's aged care workers are an important part of our aged care system and supporting them during the COVID-19 pandemic is critical. This fact sheet provides information on paid pandemic leave for aged care workers and guidance for providers to implement these changes to help stop the spread of COVID-19.

Scope

This information is relevant to aged care providers and workers.

Paid Pandemic Leave

On 29 July 2020, the Fair Work Commission issued determinations varying the Aged Care Award 2010, the Nurses Award 2010 and the Health Professionals and Support Services Award 2020. Aged care workers employed under these awards are entitled to two weeks' paid pandemic leave if they are required to self-isolate due to having coronavirus symptoms or being a close contact of a confirmed case.

Government Support for Paid Leave in Declared Victorian Hotspots

Support for Aged Care Workers in COVID-19 (SACWIC) Grant

- On 4 August 2020, the Department of Health opened the SACWIC Grant Opportunity on the GrantConnect website, www.grants.gov.au.
- The Grant is designed to minimise the risk of infection to aged care workers, residents and other consumers of aged care in Greater Melbourne and Mitchell Shire, Victoria.
- Grant funding is available for eligible approved Residential Aged Care providers, approved NATSIFACP providers and approved Home Care providers when workers are not to attend work due to:
 - having symptoms of COVID-19;
 - being diagnosed with COVID-19;
 - being tested for COVID-19 and awaiting results;
 - being directed to self-isolate or quarantine for a reason related to COVID-19 or
 - because of measures taken by government or medical authorities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Under this Grant, providers can apply for funding to support workers:
 - who are under award wages and need to take 'Paid Pandemic Leave' under the award;
 - who need to take leave for testing, quarantine or self-isolation and don't have access to or adequate accrued paid personal (sick) leave provisions;
 - who need to take leave due to experiencing COVID-19 symptoms or being diagnosed as COVID-19 positive and don't have access to or adequate accrued paid personal (sick) leave provisions.

Pandemic Leave Disaster Payment

- On 3 August 2020, the Australian Government announced a \$1,500 Pandemic Leave Disaster Payment for Victorians who need to isolate for 14 days and have no access to, or insufficient, personal (sick) leave entitlements. Affected individuals are able to access this payment multiple times if they are in a position where they will have to self-isolate again.
- For workers whose employer is ineligible for the SACWIC Grant, they can consider applying for the Pandemic Leave Disaster Payment. Further information can be found at the Services Australia [website](#).
- Workers whose employers receive funding through the SACWIC Grant to provide them with paid leave are not eligible for the Pandemic Leave Disaster Payment.

\$450 Coronavirus (COVID-19) Test Isolation Payment

- The Victorian Government has made available the \$450 Coronavirus (COVID-19) Test Isolation Payment which provides financial support while workers self-isolate to wait for the results of a coronavirus (COVID-19) test.
- For workers whose employer is ineligible for the SACWIC Grant, they can consider applying for the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Test Isolation Payment. Further information can be found on the [DHHS website](#).
- Workers whose employers receive funding through the SACWIC Grant to provide them with paid leave are not eligible for the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Test Isolation Payment.

Implementation

Any employee who experiences COVID type symptoms must:

- a) notify their employer as soon as practicable that they are unwell and experiencing COVID-like symptoms. This may be after any leave has commenced.
- b) not attend for work and must be tested for COVID as soon as practicable, and remain in isolation until they are tested and return a negative/not detected result for COVID-19 and is no longer displaying COVID-like symptoms.
- c) be granted personal (sick) leave if they have an entitlement.

A worker without any or sufficient personal (sick) leave, or who is not eligible for personal (sick) leave, should be placed on paid leave, regardless of whether the worker is entitled to paid pandemic leave under an award.

The employer is entitled to request, and the worker will provide on request, evidence that would satisfy a reasonable person that the worker has been tested, and where applicable, is required to quarantine or self-isolate.

Continuity of service is protected (including for redundancy purposes) and long service leave will continue to accrue.

As a result of taking this paid leave, the worker will not be disadvantaged in the future with respect to progression, development, learning and other opportunities in the workplace.

Support from providers, peak bodies, industrial bodies and Governments

Government

The Australian Government is supporting the sector to implement paid pandemic leave through the SACWIC Grant, funding for the Industry Support Hub and the Pandemic Leave Disaster Payment.

SACWIC Grant

The Australian Government is providing funding under the SACWIC Grant to help providers and workers in designated hotspots to stop the spread of COVID-19 by minimising the potential risk of workers unintentionally transmitting COVID-19.

The Government has agreed to fund “eligible expenditure”, including:

- paying workers under award wages who need to take ‘Paid Pandemic Leave’
- paying workers who need to take leave for testing, quarantine or self-isolation and do not have adequate personal leave provisions
- paying workers who are unable to work due to symptoms or being diagnosed as COVID-19 positive where workers do not have sufficient (less than 10 days) sick or personal leave provisions or where personal leave is exhausted.

Industry Support Hub

An Industry Support Hub has been established to support providers to implement the [Guiding Principles](#) and eligible activities under the SACWIC Grant.

Pandemic Leave Disaster Payment

The Australian Government is providing a lump sum payment to Victorians to help them during the 14 days they need to isolate if they can't earn an income in that time. This payment replaces the Victorian Government's \$1,500 Coronavirus (COVID-19) Worker Support Payment. Further information is available [here](#).

Providers

The SACWIC Grant is open on the GrantConnect website, www.grants.gov.au, as 'GO4215 – Support for Aged Care Workers in COVID-19'. To apply, providers must complete the online grant opportunity application form. They can submit applications between 15 July 2020 and 31 May 2021.

If providers are not eligible for the SACWIC Grant, they should advise their workers of the Pandemic Leave Disaster Payment. To apply for the payment, workers can contact Services Australia on **180 22 66**. The line is open from 8am to 8pm Monday – Friday, and 9am – 5pm Saturday and Sunday.

Peaks and Industries

The peak bodies will provide mentorship to providers to assist them to maintain the safety of their consumers and workers during COVID-19. The unions representing aged care workers will continue to represent member interests and ensure that members are provided with the right information and support to guide their decisions in accordance with the Guiding Principles.

Providers and workers can access the Guiding Principles Support Hub which has been established to provide tools and advice to assist them in understanding these changes. They can find further information at:

- Website and online form: supporthub.agedservicesworkforce.com.au
- Hotline: 1800 491 793 Monday to Friday 8:30 am to 5:00 pm.

In addition, aged care workers can receive free counselling services from [Converge International](#) if they are affected by these changes and seek additional support.