

MEDIA RELEASE

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Aged care homes “must not ruin Christmas” by barring visitors

Many older Australians are at risk of a ruined Christmas with a minority of rogue aged care providers still preventing them from seeing their loved ones, or excessively restricting visiting, says Council on the Ageing (COTA) Australia; warning providers that their residents have a right to spend part of their Christmas with family.

Ian Yates AM, Chief Executive of COTA Australia, says while most providers are doing the right thing and ensuring good length in-person visits between residents and families, there are still disturbingly regular reports of aged care homes that are preventing residents from seeing their loved ones, or heavily restricting visits.

“Aged care residents have been the worst affected by this pandemic. Many were left feeling afraid and isolated this year, cut off from visits and support from family and loved ones as aged care homes slammed their doors closed, with many throwing away the key for too long,” says Mr Yates.

“Older Australians deserve a loving Christmas, this year more than ever. That means in person, not restricted to a window “visit”, which is NOT a visit at all under the Visitor Code. It is the duty of providers to make sure visits can take place at a range of times such as on weekends, early evening, and over the Christmas holidays, with all agreed precautions.

“The efforts of the aged care sector and its staff to keep people safe during this unprecedented crisis have for the most part been extremely commendable. But some are still not putting the mental health and human rights of older Australians first, as the Aged Care Royal Commission pointed out in its recent COVID-19 Report.

“We are referring all reports to the relevant provider peak bodies and, if necessary, the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission, which is now pursuing this vigorously. If we don’t see providers lifting their game, we are not afraid to name and shame those who are needlessly isolating the people in their care.”

A national [Visitor Code](#) was initiated by COTA and developed and endorsed by 13 consumer and aged care provider peak bodies earlier this year, and by the Federal Government. It is based on the human rights of residents. It has recently been updated in line with Australian government health guidelines that say that homes should be freely permitting visits, with appropriate infection control procedures.

“There is simply no reason why providers should be cutting the people in their care off from their loved ones,” says Mr Yates.

“If peak bodies and the national regulators cannot pull rogue aged care facilities into line, we will be forced to make their behaviour public, and to ask the government to make the Code mandatory.

“Every one of us needs love and connection, particularly after the events of this year. A few rogue providers doing the wrong thing must not ruin Christmas for those who have waited so long to spend time with their loved ones again.”

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For residents, carers, families and friends wishing to report concerns where the Code is not being effective in facilitating visits or any other feedback, please visit <https://www.cota.org.au/policy/aged-care-reform/agedcarevisitors/the-right-to-visit/> or call 1300 COTA AU (1300 268 228).