

Life Without Barriers

COVID-19 - EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Pandemic Plan

WE
LIFE WITHOUT BARRIERS
WE

Championing opportunity for all

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Purpose

The purpose of this plan is to enable Life Without Barriers (LWB) to mobilise, respond, adapt and recover, from the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19). We have two simple yet powerful organisational priorities:

1. Continuity of care for the people we support
2. Promoting the ongoing health and wellbeing of our employees.

Planning our Pandemic Response

What is a Pandemic?

A pandemic is the worldwide spread of an infectious disease. Pandemics are more likely if a virus is new, able to infect people easily and can spread from person to person in an efficient and sustained way.

Pandemics are generally expected to last for a few months and have significant impact on staffing levels.

The COVID-19 Pandemic

A COVID-19 outbreak first occurred in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. It is now spreading throughout the world. A coronavirus is a type of virus that is known to cause respiratory infections. Symptoms include fever, fatigue and a dry cough. The virus is spread from person to person through:

- Direct close contact with a person while they are infectious or in the 24 hours before their symptoms appeared.
- Close contact with a person with a confirmed infection who coughs or sneezes.
- Touching objects or surfaces contaminated from a cough or sneeze from a person with a confirmed infection, and then touching the mouth or face.

While most people who become infected will recover without needing any special treatment, people over the age of 60 and those with chronic diseases may be more severely affected. Life Without Barriers supports many vulnerable people who will be at a higher risk of impact from the virus.

Organisational Context

Life Without Barriers supports some of the most vulnerable people all around the country. In every area of our operations, we help people access services and participate in the community. We support close to 23,000 people living in over 400 communities across the nation, in urban, rural and remote locations. We have 120 offices and provide 24/7 care in 650 homes around Australia. Our geographical spread increases the risk that we will be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, compared with a local, regional or state based provider.

While all our clients, carers and employees may be impacted by a pandemic, the following groups may be more vulnerable:

- Elderly people, who may require additional assistance or care, or may have underlying health conditions.
- People with disabilities and medical needs, particularly those that require personal care, medication and medical equipment, as well as special transport arrangements.
- People with behavioural issues; who may require additional assistance or care.
- People with mental health issues; who may experience additional anxiety or social isolation.
- Children and young people, who for example may need to be in the care of an approved adult or household member.

- Culturally and linguistically diverse communities, including clients who are from refugee and asylum seeker communities, where language may be a barrier to understanding emergency information.
- Employees, clients and carers in rural or remote areas, which may not have the health system service capacity typically available in urban areas.
- Clients who are experiencing homelessness and may be socially isolated.
- Other vulnerable employees, clients and carers who, due to their physical or cognitive disability, are unable to understand emergency warnings and directions, or unable to respond in an emergency event.

The COVID-19 pandemic is expected to impact on the availability of Life Without Barriers services for the people we support.

Organisational Risks associated with the COVID-19 Pandemic

In addition to the risk of clients and/or employees contracting an infectious disease, the COVID-19 pandemic presents multiple risks, including:

- Lack of continuity of service delivery to clients and carers.
- Shortages of critical supplies, including medical supplies, equipment, personal protective equipment (e.g. masks and gloves) and essential grocery items.
- The public health system becoming overwhelmed, which may present issues for clients with high and/or complex medical needs.
- Staff shortages – this may be due to illness, preventative quarantine, caring for others, school closures or anxiety – leading to workforce shortages/inability to provide services.
- Financial implications – due to decreased service delivery, increased reliance on agency staff.
- Increased difficulties in meeting regulatory and contractual obligations.

Planning Assumptions

The future characteristics and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are difficult to accurately predict. This plan has been developed using the following assumptions.

Medical Characteristics

- The pandemic will continue to spread rapidly.
- Infected people start showing symptoms after as little as three days.
- Infected people are contagious from 24 hours before symptoms commence until fourteen days after the symptoms cease.
- The virus will be widespread and could be fatal for approximately 2.5 per cent of infected people.
- The pandemic will occur in several “waves”, each wave lasting approximately eight weeks.
- A vaccine for the pandemic is likely to take approximately 12-18 months to develop.

Community-related Characteristics

- Fear and anxiety in the community is likely to continue and potentially increase.
- Key community services (e.g. health services, schools, childcare facilities and public transport) will be disrupted, with little notice provided.
- A general and broad economic downturn will occur.

- There may be uncertainty and inconsistency in government responses and media reports, increasing confusion and anxiety.
- Social distancing measures have been recommended by the government / health officials to help mitigate the impacts of the pandemic. These may be followed by lockdown procedures.

Life Without Barriers -specific Assumptions

- Absenteeism could be between 30-50 per cent during the height of the pandemic, due to illness, caring for others or quarantine / self-isolation.
- Employees showing symptoms, or who have been in close contact with an infected person, are more likely to infect others, and will be asked to self-isolate.
- The likely scale of the impact of COVID-19 requires a tactical adaptive approach to actively mitigate risks and position Life Without Barriers to meet the two key organisational priorities: continuity of care, health and wellbeing.

Identification of Critical Operations

Critical Life Without Barriers Services

An important aspect of emergency preparedness and response processes is to determine the most critical Life Without Barriers services across the country. As a result, we categorise each of our services as one of the following:

- **Essential Services**

Any direct or indirect support without which the safety, health or welfare of clients or employees would be endangered or seriously impacted. This includes some in home supports, supported living / residential care, probity, incident management and critical corporate activities.

- **Non-Essential Services**

All direct and indirect supports which have no material impact on the safety, health or welfare of clients or employees. This includes day centre / community access activities, continuous improvement projects and routine administration / reporting.

Critical Employees

Details about our key employees are captured along with nominated backup person and any agency support arrangements within client service provision and corporate functions.

Critical ICT Infrastructure/Systems

Our established disaster recovery process is supported by emergency preparedness and response processes to ensure critical systems are maintained and key employees can access these systems when they are required to work in alternate locations or remotely.

Critical External Stakeholders

We also identify the external stakeholders that must be kept aware of our changing situation. The Life Without Barriers Emergency Response Protocol identifies the key roles responsible for managing external communications.

Vulnerable Clients and Employees

The emergency preparedness and response process is designed to assess and protect the safety of our vulnerable clients and staff across the below programs:

- In-home support programs
- Community-based activities
- Day centre activities
- 24/7 supported accommodation
- Family based care
- Outreach homeless centres
- Child, Youth and Family residential care.

Success Factors

<p>Monitor Situation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor spread of pandemic nationally/globally • Monitor any related issues within LWB • Follow/seek advice from government / health authorities 	<p>People</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor absenteeism • Amend leave/flexible working arrangements • Support clients, carers and employees affected by pandemic • Return to work processes and leave gift arrangements 	<p>Safety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimise risks to clients, carers and employees • Rapid response to isolated cases or outbreaks • Contact tracing where clients / employees become ill
<p>Technology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable remote work • Support teleconferencing instead of face to face meetings 	<p>Communications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular communications with employees / clients / stakeholders via multiple channels • Provide clients with appropriate communications about hygiene 	<p>Service Delivery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain critical services • Provide services to clients with infectious disease • Provide services remotely where possible
<p>Scenario Planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accurately forecast critical impacts • Identify and address major risk factors 	<p>Adaptation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare and implement tactical plans • Proactively adapt to emerging circumstances 	<p>Business Continuity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain viable services • Limit financial and staffing impacts

Key Scenario Types

We have prepared scenario decision-making guides to assist employees when presented with likely scenarios. Some of these scenarios are described below.

1	A client, employee, or one or more of their family members is being tested for the virus. A healthy client or employee has been in contact with someone being tested for the virus.
2	A client, or one or more of their family members, has tested positive for the virus. An employee, or one or more of their family members, has tested positive for the virus.
3	A respite home is closed with all clients removed.
4	Limited or no staff are available to work the allocated roster.
5	A foster carer is unable to continue to provide care, due to illness or other impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We also apply scenario planning and business forecasting to enable rapid tactical responses to operational circumstances as they emerge during the COVID-19 emergency, including some listed below.

6	Supply chain disruption.
7	Management shortages.
8	Large-scale service delivery changes.
9	Regulatory relief and contract changes.
10	Sharing economy and other innovations.

Management during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Alert Phases

Our pandemic emergency response consists of the following four phases – delivered either as separate or concurrent activities.

Phase 1 – Mobilise

This phase occurs when a highly contagious virus is verified in Australia. Isolated cases are most likely, and containment is the primary goal. We will monitor the spread of the disease, adhere to government advice and prepare for any potential escalated response.

Life Without Barriers Response

During this phase, Life Without barriers clients, employees and stakeholders may be concerned, but are largely unaffected by the pandemic. In response, we will:

- Establish an emergency management team and identify other critical roles that will be involved in the pandemic response.
- Identify essential and non-essential services as well as clients with high/complex medical needs (and their direct support employees).
- Develop local pandemic response plans.

Phase 2 – Respond

This phase occurs when there is human to human transmission of a highly contagious virus in Australia, with low to medium spread and/or impact. We will continue to monitor the spread of the disease, seek government advice on essential service provision, implement social distancing and relevant lockdown protocols and reduce non-essential services.

Life Without Barriers Response

During this phase, Life Without Barriers clients, employees and stakeholders may be infected or living with an infected person, and there is increasing concern for vulnerable people. Up to a quarter of employees could be unavailable to support clients or corporate functions. In response we will:

- Activate local pandemic response plans
- Closely monitor the impact within Life Without Barriers
- Scale down affected services
- Remain aware of, and adhere to, notification requirements of all relevant federal, state and territory statutory authorities
- Communicate regularly with Clients, Carers, Staff, Stakeholders, Executive and Board.

Phase 3 – Adapt

This phase involves the widespread human to human transmission of a highly contagious virus in Australia, with high impact in the community. We will follow government advice on essential service provision, enact full lockdown protocols and ensure essential services continue to operate.

Life Without Barriers Response

During this phase, Life Without Barriers clients, employees and stakeholders will be significantly affected and all non-essential service delivery will cease. In response we will:

- Engage government support for vulnerable clients
- Maintain pandemic response plans
- Implement scenario planning and rapid, tactical business adaptation to actively manage emerging risks and ensure business continuity
- Provide regular internal reporting about the impact within Life Without Barriers, including the number of infected people or casualties, the number of lockdowns and clients/employees in isolation, resources needed, risks and any mitigating actions
- Communicate regularly with Clients, Carers, Staff, Stakeholders, Executive and Board.

Phase 4 – Recover and Resume

Once health officials confirm that the COVID-19 pandemic is under control, we will focus on relief, recovery and resuming operations. During this phase, we will:

- Stand down the national controller and NEMT
- Complete a debrief and evaluation of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact
- Use the information gathered during the debrief and evaluation to review this plan and related documents
- Transition to relief and recovery.
- Resume business as usual (BAU) operations.

Health and Safety Measures

We are committed to protect the health and safety of our employees, clients and carers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, some of the methods we will use to protect our people are outlined below.

Health Advice and Support

Encouraging employees to:

- Call the nurse-led Coronavirus Health Information Hotline if they are unwell.
- Notify a dedicated internal team if they have any concerns or questions about the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Contact the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to access free mental health support if needed.

Infection Control

- Provide advice to employees to stay home if they are sick or have been in contact with someone who is suspected to have, or has, the COVID-19 virus.
- Provide personal protective equipment (e.g. gloves, masks) to employees when required.
- Regularly clean and disinfect high touch surfaces and working surfaces.
- Open windows where possible.
- Educate and inform staff and clients about good hygiene practices.
- Postpone all non-essential visits to our supported independent living / residential care homes.

Social Distancing and Quarantine

- Avoid handshakes and physical contact.
- Where possible, keep 1.5 metres away from other people in a shared environment.
- Hold meetings via video/phone conference, rather than face to face.
- Follow self-isolation / quarantine controls recommended by government / health officials.

Working from Home

Where possible, our employees will be encouraged to work from home. Most client services will need to be delivered in person, but some may be possible via a phone or video call.

Vaccinations

We continue to monitor the availability of a vaccine for the COVID-19 virus and develop a vaccination plan if it is available during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the meantime, we are rolling out our annual influenza immunisation program.

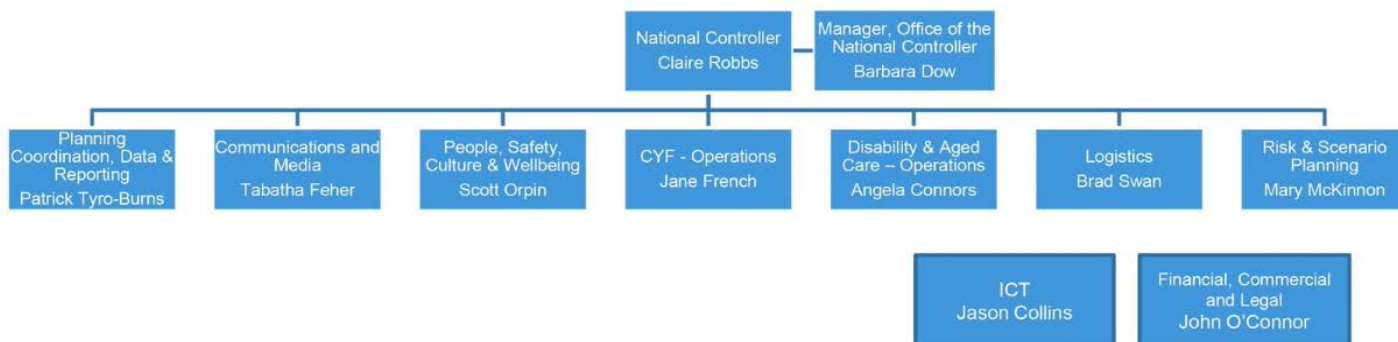
Travel

We have postponed all non-essential business travel, including for meetings, conferences and workshops.

Roles and Responsibilities

During the COVID-19 pandemic we adopt the reporting structure in the Emergency Response Protocol, including a National Controller (Chief Executive) and Executive-level stream leads, as outlined below.

COVID-19 NATIONAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT TEAM (NEMT) STRUCTURE



The leads identified are supported by a range of specialists dedicated to help us manage our response to COVID-19.

Delegation of Authority

The roles and responsibilities described in this plan should be read in conjunction with the Life Without Barriers Delegations of Authority Schedule. In the event of inconsistencies or conflict, the roles and responsibilities described in this plan override the delegations outlined in the Schedule.

National Emergency Management Team

A National Emergency Management Team (NEMT) has been established to support the National Controller to manage the COVID-19 pandemic response. The structure is scalable and may include these functions:

- Client Services and Operations
- Planning, Coordination, Data and Reporting
- Communications and Media
- External Stakeholder and Sector liaison and advocacy
- People, Safety, Culture and Wellbeing
- Logistics and Assets
- Risk and Scenario Planning
- ICT
- Financial, Commercial and Legal.

Responsibilities

The following table provides a summary of the key functional responsibilities for the COVID-19 pandemic response.

Role	Responsibilities
National Controller	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appoint Executive functions in the National Emergency Management Team (NEMT). • Manage the NEMT and liaise with emergency services and/or multi-agency response teams. • Determine strategic response priorities, resource requirements and expert response capability requirements. • Oversee adaptive tactical planning to reposition the business approach where required. • Approve internal and external communications.
National Emergency Management Team functions	
Client Services and Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain contact with clients, carers and families impacted or potentially impacted by pandemic. • Monitor the situation on the ground and local conditions. • Manage: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – support for clients and their networks – employee rosters. • Maintain continuity of essential client services and suspend non-essential operations.
Planning, Coordination, Data and Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate and monitor NEMT stream activity. • Monitor tactical response plans and support urgent business development activity. • Maintain timely, accurate data reports for all relevant parties.
Communications and Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop internal and external communications and liaise with media. • Develop and execute external, internal and client communications.
People, Safety, Culture and Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect employees to appropriate support services (e.g. EAP). • Provide timely advice about workforce capacity. • Provide advice to employees about their individual entitlements. • Provide information and advice on health and safety response activities and wellbeing supports available.

Role	Responsibilities
Logistics and Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support employees and clients to find suitable alternative accommodation, if required, including developing accommodation plans. • Organise transport options for employees and clients impacted by the pandemic, particularly those with special needs. • Monitor, manage and respond to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – critical infrastructure impacts and supply chain disruption – evacuation notices or regional lockdowns – fleet and property impacted by the pandemic.
Risk and Scenario Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake scenario planning to identify solutions to key business operational challenges. • Maintain and monitor organisational risk registers. • Coordinate tactical plans in response to emerging risks. • Coordinate regulatory engagement and related business continuity preparedness.
ICT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable remote work capability across corporate teams. • Manage critical ICT infrastructure. • Maintain robust business support capability.
Financial, Commercial and Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forecast and monitor financial impacts through reduced service activity. • Undertake contract relief negotiations. • Manage critical financial risks.

Local Emergency Response Planning

This plan recognises the important role of local sites in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. The arrangements within this plan ensure that local employees are involved in response activities and provided with the coordination and support necessary to effectively respond to key scenarios.

Communications Approach

Communications issued during the COVID-19 pandemic will be:

- Relevant, timely, accessible and clear
- Tailored to impacted communities and cohorts (including the use of Easy English or community languages)
- Provided through a range of communication channels (e.g. text, email, social media).

Collaboration and coordination of both internal and external communications between the National Controller and the National Emergency Management Team is necessary to ensure that employees, clients and carers receive consistent, accessible and timely communications during the pandemic.