

COVID-19 Considerations for Retirement Living

There has been a lot of discussion this week around the appropriate action retirement living managers should be taking in relation to their staff and residents.

Perhaps the best way to respond to this situation is to collaborate with your village team and residents committee to develop a response unique to your village. In preparing such response below highlights some areas that should be given consideration: -

Business Continuity Planning

How will the village operate under further restrictions?

Consider the development of a business continuity plan that deals with the likely stages across the next 6 months including responding to government restrictions, the development of an outbreak in the wider community, the development of an outbreak within the village and the impact on key persons that deliver vital services within the village.

In the event your village is co-located with an Aged Care Facility where resources and facilities are shared it would be expected that many of the restrictions placed on Aged Care will impact the ability for residents, visitors and staff of the village to access these areas.

Resident Meetings

What if further restrictions impact your legislative obligations to residents?

Consider how Resident Committee meetings, Budget meetings and Annual meeting will be held in the event restrictions on gathering's tighten, (video, smaller groups, written, allowing for additional steps and time). The Property Council Retirement Living committees are currently working with each states regulatory bodies to obtain guidelines should the governments health restrictions impact on operator's ability to hold annual meetings and alike, keep an eye out for their advice.

Employees

It is important to remember that you have a high level of responsibility to your employees.

It is timely that there is some consideration given to workforce planning for the village and its support staff. Consider additional communication strategies required both to provide information and direction and to offer ongoing support? Compulsory Flu vaccines? More regular staff/toolbox meetings? Consider in what scenarios should or should not staff be dealing face to face with residents, and how will this be done if not face to face? Identify what roles are able to work from home? Are staff restricted to working in one location? What does essential travel mean in your organisation? Do you need a rotating roster of 50% of the staff work from home while the other 50% of the staff work at the village? What are the workforce minimums for the village to continue operating? Will you require any additional technology support if further restrictions are put in place ie. Microsoft Teams/ Skype/laptop provisions? Can you buddy team members working from home to support each other?

Communications

Communication will be paramount throughout this period.

What are the intervals for which communication will be issued (post government announcement, weekly, written, by video, etc) throughout this period for residents and staff? Should these communications be extended to resident families and regular visitors to the village? What communication tools do village staff need to assist them in their role? Is there a need for additional signage or posters in the village?

Procurement

Having basic supplies will be vital to enable the safety of all within the community.

Develop a procurement list of likely items that may be needed as restrictions progress hand sanitizers, masks, technology, webcams and basic supplies.

Are there more local suppliers such as independent supermarkets that may consider deliveries to the village? Check in with the local larger supermarket chains around their delivery commitment to the vulnerable?

Community Activity

Community activity is a large part of why residents choose retirement living.

Develop a strategy around community activities ranging from large gatherings through to smaller gatherings (4-20) in community areas. This strategy may need to take into account the current situation and government guidelines and restrictions, an outbreak in the wider community and an outbreak in the village.

Where there are services such as hairdressers, beauticians, wellness centres it might be timely to consider 1 client at a time attendance.

Resident Welfare

With the likelihood of increase illness with potentially fatal consequences resident welfare must be kept top of mind.

It is expected that resident welfare will be impacted significantly as the restrictions tighten across the nation as well as operate it enforced restrictions that may cease access to communal areas and community activity. Therefore, planning around phone welfare checks (either done via village, family or external contractor), virtual engagement opportunities and/or the opportunity for small gatherings outdoors maybe needed to be considered.

Consideration around the need for additional registers such as overseas holiday registers for both staff and residents?

In the event of further restrictions what role will the village play in supporting resident with the likes of obtaining online shopping and access to basic living supplies?

Who and how will onsite welfare checks be conducted in the event of a perceived or identified emergency/death?

Contractors/Visitors

The management of visitors to the village will be important in reducing the spread of the virus to the village community.

There may be additional steps required for visitors and or contractors such as sign in and sign out registers, declaration forms, the taking of temperatures and the restriction to certain areas within the village.

With School Holidays approaching there may be the need to consider communication around restrictions in common areas and facilities such as pools and gyms for children under the age of 16.

Marketing and Sales

There will be a likely need to undertake marketing and sales activities differently over the next six months.

Consideration should be given to long term marketing strategies that may be required to limit face to face engagement, information sessions conducted in smaller groups away from the village, digital listings and platforms, virtual tours, video presentations, and online group presentations.

Depending upon the restrictions the move from open inspections to face to face inspections, with declarations prior to visiting the village undertaken, and the restriction on the ability to tour communal facilities.

Reputation management

It is important to be prepared to respond in the event the virus activity impacts your villages reputation both from a business perspective, staff and resident impact.

Consider what other public relations support you may require in the event your village is impacted with an outbreak of the virus, or if a village nearby is impacted with an outbreak of the virus. What additional support may your staff need? What are the proactive steps that you can put in place to minimise this impact?

Financial Impact

It is very likely a number of operators will be required to revisit their financial management strategies for the next 12-18 months.

Operators should consider the impact of the external environment on its financial management particularly where legislative buybacks may be required. The external impacts may include ability to refurbish in a timely manner, reduction of sale prices, slowing of perspective enquiry, slowing of decision making, and reduced settlement targets. It is important that consideration is given in relation to timely communication of these matters with the required stakeholders and proactive planning be implemented as soon as practical.