

## Fact sheet:

# Supporting people with disability through the COVID-19 pandemic – Understanding Queensland Public Health Directions

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Queensland's Chief Health Officer has issued directions to assist in containing, or to respond to, the spread of COVID-19 within the community. These directions specifically recognise the needs of people with disability.

People with disability may be at higher risk of contracting or suffering serious complications if they contract COVID-19. People with disability also need to be confident that they will continue to be able to access essential disability services to meet their support needs.

### What this factsheet covers

This fact sheet outlines how the following current directions apply to people with disability, organisations, workers and volunteers providing support services to people with disability in Queensland:

- Home Confinement, Movement and Gathering Direction (No. 2)
- Non-essential business, activity and undertaking Closure Direction (No. 7)
- Self-isolation for Diagnosed Cases of COVID-19 Direction.

If a person with disability is in an aged care setting or a hospital, different rules apply.

This fact sheet is current as at 26 April 2020. All current public health directions can be found at [www.health.qld.gov.au/system-governance/legislation/cho-public-health-directions-under-expanded-public-health-act-powers](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/system-governance/legislation/cho-public-health-directions-under-expanded-public-health-act-powers).

### Who the factsheet is for

This fact sheet provides guidance to disability service providers (including NDIS registered providers) and their employees; and carers and volunteers providing support to persons with disability. Support services to people with disability include supports provided to them in their home, whether they live on their own or with other people. It also includes supports provided to them outside their home, such as support in the community.



If you are a person with disability or a family or friend of a person with disability and are looking for additional guidance, please refer to the Queensland Disability Network suite of resources at <https://qdn.org.au/home/covid-19/>.

Service providers may also wish to refer to the Australian Government's *Management and Operational Plan for People with Disability* for more information: <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/management-and-operational-plan-for-people-with-disability>.

### **Applying the factsheet**

This fact sheet is intended to be a guide for providers on how the public health directions may be applied – it does not replace or change the requirements in the current public health directions.

Service providers should apply the public health directions in a way that respects and upholds the rights of people with disability including their right to make decisions about how they receive services in their homes and how, if they live in group homes, those homes operate to meet the public health directions.

### **Health, safety and wellbeing**

**We strongly urge people aged over 70, anybody over 65 with a chronic disease, and Indigenous people over 50 to stay at home for their own protection.**

If you are a disability worker, volunteer or person with disability and do need to go out, please remember to protect yourself and/or your clients by following these necessary steps:

1. Clean your hands regularly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use or alcohol-based hand rubs.
2. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or bent elbow when coughing or sneezing.
3. Avoid touching your face, nose and mouth and avoid shaking hands.
4. Stay home if you are unwell.
5. Avoid contact with anyone who is unwell – try to stay 1.5m away from anyone coughing or sneezing.

Queensland Health has provided more information at: <https://www.qld.gov.au/health/conditions/health-alerts/coronavirus-covid-19/take-action/social-distancing>.



## **Supporting and visiting people with disability**

Disability services are an essential service.

People providing services to people with disability (including as a volunteer) are permitted to leave their house to go to work if their work cannot be done from home.

**This means disability workers and volunteers can visit, care for and support their clients at their clients' residences.**

There is a rule that a person who is an owner, resident, tenant, occupier, temporary occupier or person in control of a residence may only allow up to two visitors who are not ordinarily members of the person's household.

**This means, for example, a person with disability can have up to two family members, or up to two friends, visit them at their residence.**

If a person with disability shares accommodation with other people, it may be necessary for the person in charge of the residence to have some guidelines about visiting so they can make sure there aren't too many people visiting at once. Those guidelines should be developed with the people who live in the residence so that the individual needs and circumstances of all residents are taken into account.

**People with disability sharing accommodation can still have visitors**, but visits might need to be arranged in advance and visits might need to be shorter than usual to make sure everyone can have a visit.

Even if a person with disability has two visitors, they can also have workers and volunteers, as they are not counted as visitors.

**People with disability who need to have more than two people in their home to provide them with support services are allowed to.**

To make it even clearer, the direction specifically states that it is permitted for a person with disability to have more than two people attend their residence to provide services and meet support needs.

Disability workers, volunteers and visitors should take reasonable steps to encourage everyone who doesn't ordinarily live in a residence to practice social distancing to the extent reasonably practicable.

Social distancing includes remaining at least 1.5 metres away from other persons (note also general health, safety and well-being tips).

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## Supporting a person with disability away from their residence

**Disability workers and volunteers (or family or friends) are allowed to help people with disability leave their residences.**

Everyone is allowed to leave their house for permitted purposes.

Permitted reasons for a person to leave their residence are:

- to obtain essential goods and services
- to receive medical treatment or health care services
- to exercise, either alone or with one other person or those who reside in the same household
- for recreational purposes (from 12:01am on 2 May 2020), like shopping for clothing or books, or having a picnic, as long as it is within a 50km radius of the person's principal place of residence
- to do work or volunteering that is essential and cannot be done from home (this is any type of work that is not restricted under the latest '[non-essential business activity and undertaking closure](#)' direction)
- to visit another person's house, as long as there are no more than 2 people who are not ordinarily members of that household
- to visit a terminally ill relative or attend a funeral
- to assist, care for or support immediate family members or close friends
- to attend Court or comply with a Court order
- to attend a childcare facility, school, university, or other educational institution to receive instruction that is not possible to receive at home
- to assist with an investigation by police or other law enforcement authority
- all shared custody arrangements of children under 18 years of age, whether informal or court-ordered, can continue as normal. You are allowed to leave the house to take children from one parent's home to the other parent's home
- to avoid illness, injury or the risk of harm
- to comply with directions of a government agency.

Queensland Health has released a fact sheet and FAQs for further information:

<https://www.covid19.qld.gov.au/government-actions/gatherings>.

Everyone can go out for a permitted purpose with people they normally live with or with one other person they don't live with.

Some people with disability need more than one carer or support worker to help them and that is ok. For example, a person with disability can have more than one carer go for a walk with them if that is necessary for support or to keep them safe.

If a person with disability has a behaviour support plan that requires more than one worker to accompany them that is also ok (practicing **social distancing** as much as possible, and note general health, safety and well-being tips above).



However, everyone is encouraged to limit contact as much as possible and only have in-person contact with other people when it is absolutely necessary. For example:

- if a support worker can pick up groceries or help order groceries online so a person with disability doesn't need to go to the shops, this is better than taking the person with disability shopping
- it is better to use Facetime or the phone to keep in touch with friends instead of meeting them in person
- ask if healthcare or other essential services are providing alternative options for appointments such as telehealth appointments, if appropriate.

### **Support for people with disability who have been in contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19**

Anyone who has been in close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19 will be contacted by their local public health unit and issued with a quarantine notice requiring them to remain in quarantine for a 14 day period.

Close contacts are those who have had face-to-face contact with a confirmed case for a period more than 15 minutes, or those who have shared an enclosed space with a confirmed case for more than two hours.

People in close contact may likely include disability support workers and volunteers. Disability providers will have processes in place for workers who may be instructed to self-quarantine, and workers may be able to access COVID-19 testing as a priority, to facilitate an early end to the quarantine period.

If a person with disability needs to quarantine or they are living in a home with someone who needs to quarantine, any need for disability supports should be raised with the Public Health Unit so that any quarantine notice can take into account the needs of the person with disability for ongoing support.

### **Support for people with disability who are diagnosed with COVID-19**

Anyone who is diagnosed with COVID-19 must self-isolate. The isolation period is 14 days from diagnosis, or until a clearance is received in writing from a registered nurse or medical practitioner – whichever is earlier.

This means that a person who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 must stay in hospital (if advised to do so by a doctor) or at their home or other accommodation for the isolation period.



If a person who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 is at home or in other accommodation, they are only allowed to leave their home if they are sick and need a doctor or medicine, or it is an emergency. If a person needs to see a doctor, they should call their General Practitioner and arrange a telehealth appointment. If a person needs urgent assistance, they should call an Ambulance on 000.

If a person with disability has COVID-19, they are not allowed any visitors to their home except for medical or emergency purposes.

Medical and emergency purposes include essential disability supports such as bladder and bowel management, medication management, behaviour management, respiratory management, PEG changes, pressure relief/turning and wound care, assistance with feeding and hydration, and assistance with basic personal hygiene.

If a person with disability is diagnosed with COVID-19, any need for disability supports should be raised with the Public Health Unit so that the quarantine notice can take into account the needs of the person with disability for ongoing support.

If a person with disability who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 is assessed to be medically safe to receive care in their home, service providers need to plan how they can continue to provide disability supports to the person in a way that respects and upholds their rights and dignity.

Support workers should follow the rules on using Personal Protective Equipment. (<https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/document/2001>).

### **Accessing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

Providers should continue to access PPE through their usual means. Where this is no longer possible, they should approach the National Medical Stockpile (NMS).

Access to PPE will also be prioritised for those NDIS providers who deliver personal care and other activities that require close physical contact where there is an immediate threat to continuity of safe quality care due to lack of access to PPE, or where the participant has a **confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19**.

NDIS providers and self-managing participants who can no longer access PPE supplies through usual means can contact the NMS by emailing [NDISCOVIDPPE@health.gov.au](mailto:NDISCOVIDPPE@health.gov.au).

More information is available from the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission <https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020-03/fact-sheet-covid-19-provider-information-about-ppe.pdf>.



## **Finding additional workforce**

Providers may be looking for workers to deliver much-needed disability supports, and provide extra cover.

As part of the National Disability Insurance Agency's response to the coronavirus pandemic, NDIS participants and providers can now connect with matching platforms through the NDIS website – to quickly and easily find the support workers they need.

Services the platforms offer include posting job alerts, searching for workers, booking workers and assisting with on-boarding new staff.

For more information visit <https://www.ndis.gov.au/coronavirus/finding-support-workers>.

