



Department of Health

Secretary

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James Whitton
Coroners Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
Level 11, 222 Exhibition Street
Melbourne Vic 3000



Dear Mr Whitton,

Re: Inquest into the death of Joan Ambrose (court ref: COR 2009 000711)

I refer to your letter dated 1 August 2012 detailing the findings and recommendations of the coronial inquest into the death of Joan Ambrose.

The department wishes to respond to the following recommendation made by Coroner White:

That the Victorian Department of Health amend their heat wave guidance for residential aged care facilities to specifically describe the severe hazards associated with unsupervised departures during extreme heat events and, and provide aged care providers with direction to exercise strict control over entry and exit points during these times.

The department's 'Residential aged Care Heatwave Ready Resource' ('the Resource') has been developed to assist aged care facilities to prepare and respond to extreme heat to minimise the health impacts on residents. The Resource was distributed in hard copy to all residential aged care facilities in 2010 and is publicly available on the department's website.

It should be noted that the Resource already deals with the severe hazards associated with extreme heat events. Page 23 of the Resource includes the following warning "During periods of warmer weather, monitoring the whereabouts of residents should also be increased, particularly those residents who are confused and have access to outdoor areas such as courtyards. These areas can become extremely hot and even short periods of time in these areas could put residents at risk of dehydration and heat-related illness". There is also a 'heatwave checklist' on page 31 of the Resource which advises providers to "Check that staff are aware of their responsibilities. For example monitoring weather forecasts and temperatures, monitoring residents' whereabouts, ensuring residents are hydrated".

In light of the above recommendation by the Coroner, it is proposed that the Resource be amended to stress the importance of monitoring residents' exits during heatwaves. This amendment will be made as part of the general review of the Resource.

As the responsibility for funding, regulating and monitoring aged care services sits with the Commonwealth Government, a representative from my department has written to Ms Carolyn Smith, First Assistant Secretary, Ageing and Aged Care Division, Department of Health and Ageing requesting that she also consider responding to this recommendation of Coroner White.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pradeep Philip', with a horizontal line drawn underneath it.

Dr Pradeep Philip
Secretary

19/10/2012