



## Department of Health

Secretary

50 Lonsdale Street  
Melbourne  
Victoria 3000  
GPO Box 4541  
Melbourne  
Victoria 3001  
Telephone: 1300 253 942  
Facsimile: 1300 253 964  
[www.health.vic.gov.au](http://www.health.vic.gov.au)  
DX 210311

7 MAR 2013

e2950747



Mark Roberts  
Coroners Registrar  
Coroners Court of Victoria  
Level 11  
222 Exhibition St  
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Mr Roberts

**RE: Court reference: COR 2011 003161 PEARL RECHT**

I am writing in response to your letter dated 13 December 2012 in relation to Deputy State Coroner Iain West's recommendations to the Victorian Department of Health (the department) on the above case.

Mrs Recht was a recipient of in-home services funded under a Commonwealth Community Aged Care Package.

Mrs Recht lived alone and walked with the aid of a wheelie walker. The fire was investigated by the Metropolitan Fire Brigade and Victoria Police, with no suspicious circumstances being identified. A definitive cause of the fire could not be determined due to the fire damage.

In the findings following the inquest into Mrs Recht's death, the Deputy State Coroner noted that there is a need to identify common risk features and to deliver an improved safety outcome for older people and people with disabilities.

Accordingly the Deputy State Coroner directed a copy of his findings to this department because it is an entity responsible for funding in-home care services pursuant to the Home and Community Care (HACC) Program.

The HACC Program is jointly funded by the Commonwealth and Victorian governments. The Commonwealth has responsibility for national policy development and the state has responsibility for day-to-day administration.

The Department of Health, Ageing and Aged Care Branch is responsible for managing HACC in Victoria in accordance with the national guidelines. HACC funded organisations are responsible for managing and operating their services so as to ensure compliance with HACC policies, quality standards, guidelines and other requirements.

The department's response to the Deputy State Coroner's recommendations is as follows:

**Recommendation 1a:** *That the 'Basic Home Fire Safety Training Materials' as endorsed by the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authority Council, are mandated for use by community aged care providers in Victoria, through inclusion of the information into the induction processes for new community aged care workers. These materials should also be used for skills maintenance sessions/programs conducted by community aged care providers for existing workers.*

The department's response: An alternative to the Deputy State Coroners recommendation will be implemented.

An appropriate Certificate III level qualification is the minimum standard of qualification required in Victoria for HACC Program funded community care workers (Department of Health HACC Community Care Worker Training Qualifications, July 2010). The Certificate III is part of the National Community Services Training Package 2008 (Australian Government) and it currently offers basic home fire safety information in a range of compulsory units of competency.

The 'Basic Home Fire Safety Training Materials' developed by the MFB and the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authority Council (AFAC) is the material included in compulsory units of competency for a Certificate III level qualification. This includes an understanding of the need for smoke alarms and is focussed on both the occupational health and safety aspects of community service work, but also the duty of care to clients.

As an alternative to mandating particular materials, the HACC program will recommend that service providers consider using the 'Basic Home Fire Safety Training Materials' (as appropriate) for new and existing staff.

In relation to the skills maintenance sessions conducted by community aged care providers for existing workers, the HACC program will explore with the new state-wide Education and Training Service, whether Basic Home Fire Safety using the training materials recommended by the coroner can be promoted through the HACC training calendar.

**Recommendation 1b.** *That basic home fire safety is incorporated into policy and practice guidelines for assessment processes used to assess older people for "in home" services. In residences where the client is considered at greater risk due to health or lifestyle factors (as defined in Essential Knowledge: Basic Home Fire Safety, Section 2), additional smoke alarms should be installed to provide the earliest possible warning of a fire for the occupant.*

The Department's response: The Deputy State Coroners recommendation is 'under consideration'.

The Department of Health has provided a response to the Coroners Court of Victoria to recommendations made as a result of the investigation into the death of Audrey Svikers (Case ID COR 2008 002158).

Recommendations 2 and 3 made by Coroner Heather Spooner in the Audrey Svikers case and recommendation 1b made by the Deputy State Coroner in this case are related. The HACC and Assessment Unit, Ageing and Aged Care Branch will respond to these three recommendations by consulting with service providers, the Municipal Association of Victoria and Metropolitan Fire Brigade in the next six months in order to:

- Clarify the circumstances in which service providers should either install or facilitate the maintenance and installation of battery smoke alarms as part of service delivery.
- Gather up-to-date evidence about people who are at higher risk due to health and lifestyle factors and how to best mitigate the higher risk e.g. through the installation of additional smoke alarms.

As a result of this work the department will provide an information update regarding home fire safety to HACC service providers in Victoria.

The HACC and Assessment Unit will consider these recommendations and conduct the consultation necessary by 31 July 2013.

The following resources support the response to these recommendations:

- Community Care Common Standards: Expected Outcome 1.6 Risk management; Expected Outcome 1.7 Human resource Management; Expected Outcome 1.8 Physical resources

[http://www.health.vic.gov.au/hacc/quality\\_frmwrk/common\\_standards.htm](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/hacc/quality_frmwrk/common_standards.htm)

- HACC Community Care Worker Training Qualifications July 2010

[http://www.health.vic.gov.au/hacc/prog\\_manual/index.htm](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/hacc/prog_manual/index.htm)

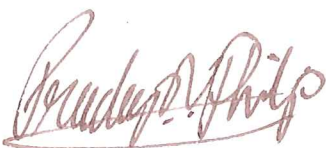
- Community Services Training Package 2008

<http://training.gov.au/Training/Details/CHC08>

If you require any further information please contact Jeannine Jacobson, Manager HACC and Assessment Unit, Ageing and Aged Care on ph: 9096 8545 or email: [jeannine.jacobson@health.vic.gov.au](mailto:jeannine.jacobson@health.vic.gov.au)

I hope this response demonstrates the department's concern to reduce risk to clients in response to the tragic death of Mrs Recht.

Yours sincerely



**Dr Pradeep Philip**  
Secretary