

COVID-19 COMMUNITY CARERS FAQ

COVID-19 has presented a series of significant challenges for the Community Care workforce. This Organising Guide has been developed to assist delegates to help protect your members' rights and health and safety at work.

Should clients wear masks whilst Community Care Workers are visiting?

This issue should be considered as part of risk assessments completed in conjunction with Health & Safety Representatives (HSRs) in your workplace (see Risk Assessment help sheet). Ultimately, it's up to each employer to make this decision as there as currently there is no binding regulation around this. As part of the Victorian Government's roadmap, there are directions for [single-person households to wear a mask](#), alongside the person in their 'bubble', which should be considered.

What should I do if family/care givers are visiting when I am attending a job, particularly from metro Melbourne or the Mitchell Shire (for regional Victoria)?

In developing a COVID-Safe plan your employer must collect records of all workers, subcontractors, customers and clients attending work premises for longer than 15 mins (See ['What obligations do I have as an employer if my business is still operating?'](#)). If there is no system to check for guests or visitors to clients homes, raise this issue with our Health and Safety Representative. You can look to other councils/employers who already do worksite safety/client health checks in-home care (enquire during delegate network meetings). This is also a consideration as part of a risk assessment. Another outcome could be the employer asking the client to inform visitors to not attend when workers are present or to wait outside if the worker is present. If clients are resistant to these strategies encourage members to raise these issues with their manager.

My employer has suggested I take my leave to replace lost hours. Do I have to?

Your employer cannot force you to take leave that is reserved for other purposes. Members speak to their delegate about the leave under their Enterprise Agreement in the first instance. Delegates may be able to assist in discussions. If the issue is not resolved ask the delegate to raise the issue at delegate meetings, at the staff consultative committee or to take the issue up with management.

My employer keeps wanting me to take sick leave for Covid-19 related issues?

The ASU supports the ACTU claim for all workers to have access to Pandemic Leave/Covid-19 Leave. If you do not have Pandemic Leave in your workplace yet, consider voting on the Pandemic leave motion found in the [COVID-Aware kit](#) at members and delegates meetings. Fight for Pandemic Leave.

Some members may be eligible for the [Pandemic Leave Disaster Payment](#) if they have no income from paid work, including sick leave entitlements. They may also be eligible for the [Coronavirus Test Isolation Payment](#) if all their sick leave (or carer's leave if a guardian) has been used.

My employer has asked me if I want to care for clients who are confirmed to have Covid-19. What are my rights?

This work requires additional training and should not be undertaken if you have not had this. Make sure the member gets in writing what is proposed. Any training should be signed off by someone formally qualified in infection control. Speak to your Health and Safety Representative to identify and address potential hazards. You have a right to protect your health and safety, and the health and safety of others, under [Section 25 of the OH&S Act](#). Alert the union to this request by contacting the member contact centre or your regular organiser.

My workplace has asked me if I have more than one job. What are my rights?

Many employers and most councils may require workers to declare if they have an additional job as part of their Code of Conduct. Refer to this policy for your workplace. In developing their COVID-Safe plan your employer is also required to keep a record of additional employers (See ['What obligations do I have as an employer if my business is still operating?'](#)). Delegates should make sure they work closely with their regular organiser to negotiate the terms with which this information is gathered and kept and for how long.

My employer has asked me if I want to work in residential aged care, what will happen if I say yes?

[The Guiding Principles Support Hub](#) was set up to help transition residential aged care workers who work across multiple residential age care facilities to work in only one. These principles do not apply to community care workers. If a community carer chooses to work in residential aged care, employers are not obliged to keep up their original overall average hours. Arrangements for community carers who decide to work at a single site are determined on a case by case basis, so your regular organiser must be involved in negotiating the return to work agreement, including transfer of leave and accrual. Call the ASU member contact centre for further advice.

It is not mandatory to work in a single site, but to eliminate risks to clients, yourself, and the community there is an increasing expectation, where possible, to consolidate your hours with a single employer. Everyone needs a fair wage, and no one should be disadvantaged in working to protect the health of our community.

My average hours have dropped dramatically and now my employer is only paying minimum hours. How can I get my hours back?

The ASU knows that community carers regularly work above their minimum contracted hours to earn a living wage. Some councils are honouring average working hours of staff. For those that aren't, make sure this issue is being raised at delegate meetings, and consultative meetings and if necessary, escalate this by calling the ASU Member Contact Centre.

Options for alternative duties include:

- Increase over the phone welfare checks
- Drop off activity packages
- Deliver books, non-grocery and food to clients
- Media training with older people in the community so they can stay connected at home.
- Meal deliveries

Clients have been cancelling and the gaps between my shifts have increased. How can I make sure my shifts are consolidated?

Bring this up in your workplace and with the delegate in the first instance. If it remains unresolved raise it with your HSR as an OHS issue. See the ASU info sheet on Risk Assessments. Time spent waiting for work in public between jobs increases risks to workers safety, particularly under COVID or over Summer. Your employer can aim to fill roster gaps.

My employer keeps changing what they consider 'essential services' which are part of my job!

Community care is defined as an essential service as part of [Stage 4 restrictions](#). If your workplace proposes to revise or cancel services there must be a period of consultation as outlined in your agreement and [Section 35 of the OHS Act](#). Delegates can escalate this issue up the chain from the delegates committee to the CC meeting alongside your regular organiser. Consider notifying your HSR as well.

A client I worked with tested positive with Covid-19, what should I do?

Inform your employer immediately. Make sure they are following DHHS advice and inform your HSR as well. Get tested and isolate until you receive your results. Ask your employer about access to Pandemic leave. Speak to your delegate or organiser for further assistance and support.

I'm not given appropriate levels of PPE for the different type of work I do. How do I get it?

DHHS has advice on the types of PPE required for the different types of work being performed. If you perceive any gaps in this advice, or if the PPE being provided is not fit for purpose then raise this with your HSR and get them to do a risk assessment. Make sure the supply of PPE is sufficient to avoid running out. This will limit multiple trips to pick up additional PPE.