



8 April 2020

Dr Ashley Bloomfield  
Director-General of Health and Chief Executive  
Ministry of Health  
PO Box 5013  
Wellington 6140

Dear Dr Bloomfield,

**COVID-19 Testing**

On behalf of the New Zealand Aged Care Association (NZACA), representing 650 member facilities accommodating over 35,000 residents, thank you for your leadership through the COVID-19 crisis.

As you will know, last Friday (3 April) the NZACA Board and Management adopted a position in response to its membership, requiring every new resident, prior to admission into aged residential care (ARC), whether from a public hospital or the community, to be tested for COVID-19. If the test is positive, then the ARC facility will not accept the resident and if the test is negative the ARC facility can admit the resident, but they will be isolated for 14 days.

We believe that our position is consistent with your own call last week for more testing of vulnerable populations. The position we have adopted is, as we've said, strongly supported by our membership.

Equally, if not more important than the science or clinical position on testing, is our ability to manage the public confidence in our sector. This extends to residents, their families and staff. Neglecting to test all admissions prior to entry into an ARC facility would be a failure not only by our providers, but also by the District Health Boards.

The NZACA does not believe the policy we have adopted is unreasonable given the capacity for COVID-19 testing in New Zealand, which is as you have said, is up to 6,000 a day. On average, around 700 people are admitted into an ARC facility nationally each week. This number represents less than 2% of total weekly testing (700/42,000), for what is the most vulnerable population group.

Only yesterday, Australia's Chief Medical Officer, Professor Brendan Murphy said this:

"Testing people with acute respiratory symptoms in cluster areas made more sense than testing asymptomatic people more broadly, except in places like aged-care facilities where the virus could wreak devastation.

The testing resource is globally finite and testing resources need to be applied where they are of greatest use and I know that as a strategy being followed by the medical profession."  
(Source, Financial Review).



Our Association and our members continue to support the Ministry of Health and the DHBs. Indeed, our nearly 40,000 beds, serviced by highly trained, qualified and dedicated staff, exist to support the public hospital system. But to maintain confidence in our sector and the people we care for, the NZACA requests that you support our position of COVID-19 testing before any admission into ARC.

I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Simon Wallace". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Simon Wallace  
Chief Executive

CC: Chris Fleming, Lead DHB CEO Aged Care