



St Basil's Homes for the Aged in Victoria

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Office of Chairman –

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The Board and staff of St. Basil's are extremely distressed at the loss of our loved residents. We share in the grief of all the relatives who have lost a loved one.

The staff of St. Basil's have been lovingly caring for all residents from the day of their arrival until we were forced to vacate the premises **at 9AM on Wednesday 22rd of July** and handover control to a completely new team that was appointed by the Department of Health.

All of our staff have been placed into self-isolation and quarantine and are not allowed to leave their homes, despite the fact that many of them had tested negative twice – the first time on Wednesday the 15th of July and the second time on Sunday the 19th of July. **All staff members who had worked for more than two hours (in infected areas) were classified as close contacts and stood down.** They will all have to retest on Sunday the 26th of July or after. Provided that they test negative, they will be able to recommence work on Thursday 30th of July when we are allowed to return to our Home.

Despite rumours to the contrary, all of our staff have been stood down **on full pay** and the union is aware of that fact and indeed have commended us on our stance. We felt that was the least we could do for our dedicated staff, who through no fault of their own, and through communal transmission, tested positive, or were being stood down despite having two negative tests on Wednesday the 15th of July and Sunday the 19th of July.

We are not willing to subject our staff to the State Government handout of \$1,500 for compensation for being stood down.

We are also being accused of having transient and casual staff. The Chairman has been at St. Basil's for 20 years. During that time no one has been employed on a casual basis. The policy at St. Basil's is that everybody works permanent or permanent part-time and is entitled to full annual, sick, compassionate, Covid and long-service leave on a pro rata basis.

The Home is registered for 150 residents (currently operating at a capacity of 120 residents) and it requires a staffing level (including replacement staff) in excess of 110. Out of this workforce, we have 50 staff members who have been working for St. Basil's in excess of 5 years. **Out of these 50 staff members, 33 of them have been working at St. Basil's in excess of 10 years. 7 of our staff members have service of over 15 years!**

This demonstrates conclusively that **we do not use a transient workforce, we do not use casuals and we value and retain our staff.** As at present date, our long service leave provision entitlements to be paid to eligible staff are in excess of \$850,000 and that money is provisioned to pay our valued employees who look after our loved residents.

We have always paid award rates or above and have negotiated fair EBA agreements, always in the top band of pay rates compared with other employers.

The other allegation raised is that the staff did not wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

We had a stockpile of PPE long before it was mandated and we handed a memorandum to all staff members upon commencement of shifts every day after the 9th of July that ***PPE policy as mandated by the Federal Government Department of Health was compulsory from Monday 13th of July.*** We note that PPE is only required to be worn when interacting with residents who are COVID-19 Positive or suspected to be COVID 19 positive and who have to be treated in isolation. We placed all our COVID-19 positive and suspected to be COVID-19 positive residents in isolation and commenced using PPE. ***PPE became compulsory on the 13th of July and we mandated that all staff during every shift wear PPE*** as mandated by the guidelines. If now, using 20/20 hindsight, it is alleged that this was too late, that is no fault of our own. We have camera vision to prove our contention for all shifts since that date.

There are some allegations that on Sunday the 19th of July 'staff were not wearing PPE'. That was only the case for people who arrived to be tested, in an isolated location, ***with no contact with any residents or the rest of the Home.*** They were in a vacated room in the wing of the home that was COVID-19 free. As soon as the testing was completed and Sonic staff (the testers) departed, the testing area was subjected to a deep clean and sanitisation.

There are also accusations that we kept quiet and did not inform the residents and relatives about the outbreak. The facts are that on July 9th one staff member reported the first positive test which was a home transmission from their sibling, living at the same premises. We immediately sent the staff member into isolation and all close contacts were sent to be tested. All close contacts were then told to self-isolate.

I stress that this staff member was asymptomatic and my first communication informing the relatives of this event was sent via email on the 10th of July. The weekend intervened and we had five staff members who returned positive tests on the 14th of July. This was communicated via email on the 15th of July when, full 100% testing of all residents and staff was conducted onsite. Regular updates with all the news and accurate figures have been sent since then on the 17th July, 19th July, 21st July and 22nd July which was the day that we had to vacate the Home.

Since then, there is very limited information that we have that we can disseminate. That is why today, I am publishing this extensive and detailed summary so that all the facts are out there and on the record. We received a briefing yesterday 23 July that lasted less than an hour. Today's briefing was cancelled. We have had no information on the status of the Home or the residents provided to us since 2PM on Thursday. We therefore have no means of updating our residents' relatives.

We understand that some residents were transferred to hospitals for further treatment as required. Whilst it is true that initially we had some issues transferring some residents to hospital, we believe now that hospitals are accepting residents who are clinically assessed and can benefit from hospital treatment. ***And late today it appears that our initial request and strategy is being acted upon. We are advised that all COVID-19 positive residents are being transferred to hospitals for further treatment.***

We appreciate that communication is very important, especially in this trying time. With all of our staff not being present and having vacated on Wednesday, there has been a gap until communications could be recommenced. We understand that all residents' relatives have now been contacted by the communications team which has commenced operations and will be updating all next-of-kin on a daily basis on the condition of their loved ones.

I am trying to re-establish the iPad communication system that we had instigated, as soon as this can be arranged and approved by the Department of Health. The iPads are at the Home and we will be allowing bookings on the old booking system that was previously used for booking your non-contact visits. You will be able to book a slot and at that time you will receive a call from an iPad-carrying carer who will enable a Facetime or Skype conversation with your loved one.

In order to avoid accusations that the communication has not been received, we will be posting the full text of this information bulletin together with all previous communications that were sent as well as the press releases and the letter of direction that we received from the Chief Health Officer Adj. Professor Brett Sutton together with our response on our website.

You may be reading in the press, online and watching on TV that the Home was asked for comment and that no one has responded. I have been an accountant (and registered tax agent CPA) approaching 50 years now and I have NEVER ever been able to get a fair-go from the 'press'. In my humble experience, they are there to sensationalise the news and sell papers, clicks and attract viewers. They edit whatever you send to suit their own agenda. The only way for me to disseminate the information is to send it directly to you and to publish it on our website.

Despite my protestations about the press, I have posted on the website a useful article from The Australian today which is informative and both specific and generalist in nature. Yes indeed, the industry needs more training and better resourced staff. But that is all a matter of funding and lack of funds is a continuous issue in Aged Care, and I say that from first hand knowledge as I have been involved in Aged Care for more than 40 years. St. Basil's is a wholly owned charity of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in Australia, dedicated to providing aged care for our community, but we admit all comers.

The last 20 years I have been at St. Basil's in an honorary capacity as a chairman/CEO at no remuneration whatsoever. I am a lay elder of the Greek Orthodox Church appointed to St. Basil's by the now deceased Archbishop Stylianos. Our current Archbishop, His Eminence Makarios, when he was enthroned last year, asked me to stay for a transitional period until we had an appropriate structure to take over.

In my 20 years at St. Basil's we have never had any sanctions imposed by 'the Agency' on the Home. We were totally cleared in all cases of any wrongdoing from the few complaints that were lodged against us over the years. Recently, when the Commonwealth Government commenced awarding 'the Service Compliance Rating', we were awarded four 'dots', which is the highest level of compliance.

During my 20 years at the Home, I have been through 7 accreditations conducted by the ACQSC (the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission and its predecessors). We passed 6 accreditations under the old standards all with 44 out of 44, **a perfect score**. We were last accredited almost 12 months ago under the new standards after an **unannounced accreditation visit** and **we passed every standard with a perfect score** and with satisfaction rates at 90% or above by our 'consumers'.

These reports are published on the ACQSC website and can be verified there.

Yours sincerely



Konstantin H Kontis
Chairman
St Basil's Homes for the Aged in Victoria

24 July 2020

Information posted on our website <https://stbasilsvic.com.au/>