



Department of Health & Human Services

50 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne Victoria 3000
Telephone: 1300 650 172
GPO Box 4057
Melbourne Victoria 3001
www.dhhs.vic.gov.au
DX 210081

e3845527

Ms Kate Doherty
Coroner's Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
66 Kavanagh Street
SOUTHBANK VIC 3006

Dear Ms Doherty

Re: Inquest into the death of Philip John Roberts Hewitt (Court Reference: COR 2012 001620)

I refer to your letter dated 19 May 2015, detailing the findings and recommendations with regard to the death of Mr Philip Hewitt, a former resident of Bellden Lodge Supported Residential Services.

As noted in the Coroner's report, supported residential services are privately operated businesses that are registered with, and regulated by, the Department of Health & Human Services (the department). Supported residential services must be registered with the State Government and are monitored to ensure they provide certain standards of personal support and accommodation. The role of the department is to administer the legislation governing supported residential services under the *Supported Residential Services (Private Proprietors) Act 2010* and *Supported Residential Services (Private Proprietors) Regulations 2012*, which commenced from July 2012.

I note you have acknowledged the department's report of January 2015 which provided extensive information about supported residential services, the responsibilities of proprietors, and the standards of support and care provided. Further to the department's previous response, I would also like to take the opportunity to highlight that the finding into death with inquest (the report) refers to supported residential services as 'Special Residents Services' and refers to staff as a 'nurse' when nurses are not typically required and staff are more likely to be employed as personal support workers.

The department takes seriously resident safety and wellbeing in supported residential services. Under the *Supported Residential Services (Private Proprietors) Act 2010* (the Act), proprietors are required to protect residents' safety and wellbeing. Proprietors are also responsible for keeping a central record of any incident that threatens the safety of a resident or staff, and it is mandatory for proprietors to report prescribed reportable incidents to the department, including serious injury, assault and unexpected death of a resident. It should be noted that the current legislation, which strengthens staffing and other requirements in supported residential services was not in place at the time of Mr Hewitt's death.

The Coroner's report into the death of Mr Hewitt made recommendations related to the department including giving consideration to:

- *mandating mental health training for staff, (or at least for more senior staff) in supported residential services; and*
- *incorporating in the compliance regime a requirement that proprietors insist on relevant staff undertaking such training.*

Section 64 of the Act sets out the minimum staffing requirements on proprietors which requires them to ensure that appropriately trained staff are employed in supported residential services to meet the needs of residents.

The department has a number of initiatives and strategies in place to ensure proprietors and staff continue to receive information about accessing training available and current knowledge about responding to residents with complex behaviours. The department, in partnership with Leading Age Services Australia Victoria, offers free, specialised training courses and workshops for supported residential services staff and proprietors. The training is designed to provide skills and knowledge to assist and improve the safety and quality of services provided to residents. The training modules *Supporting residents' health and wellbeing* and *Responding to concerning and challenging behaviours* encompass elements of mental health first aid and should equip staff with the skills and knowledge required to recognise serious threats, interpret threats and take appropriate action.

The department also provides regular communication to supported residential service proprietors regarding a range of issues. These include a quarterly newsletter, ad hoc fact sheets and regular meetings between departmental regional staff and supported residential services proprietors to discuss issues. Proprietors and staff are encouraged to access community services including general practitioners, the mental health sector and allied health sectors in order to better manage and support resident needs where this is required, as not all supported residential services require these services.

Under regulation 36(3) of the *Supported Residential Services (Private Proprietors) Regulations 2012*, proprietors must ensure that each services' Personal Support Coordinator undertakes a minimum of 40 hours training every three years in priority areas approved by me, as Secretary. I have already issued priority training areas for personal support coordinators and current priority areas include:

- identifying and reporting sexual assault;
- management and response to aggressive behaviours;
- identifying and responding to family violence; and
- working with people with complex behavioural issues such as people with complex mental health or anti-social behaviours.

In response to the Coroner's recommendations, the department will also implement the following initiatives in 2015-2016:

- The *Responding to concerning and challenging behaviours* training module will have a greater emphasis on mental illness, and a new facilitator will be sourced with expertise in delivering training in mental health and mental health first aid. The *Supporting residents' health and wellbeing* training module will undergo similar enhancements, to deliver a greater focus on mental illness.

- Mental health first aid training will be offered statewide and incorporated into the specialised, ongoing supported residential services training program. While this training is available to all staff, it will be a requirement for proprietors, managers, personal support coordinators and ongoing personal support workers of pension-level supported residential services to attend this training in order to retain their eligibility for funding support through the Supporting Accommodation for Vulnerable Victorians Initiative and the Pension Level Project programs.
- Mental health first aid training will be a priority training area for personal support coordinators
- A condition will be placed on the registration of pension-level supported residential services that requires staff to attend mental health first aid training.

The department's Authorised Officers will continue to monitor compliance with the requirement to undertake a minimum of 40 hours training every three years in approved priority areas as part of their targeted compliance review of staffing in supported residential services.

If you have any queries regarding this information, please contact Kathryn Lamb, Assistant Director, Residential Services Unit, on 9096 7581 or via email Kathryn.Lamb@dhhs.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



Dr Pradeep Philip
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services

14/08/2015