



Coroner Audrey Jamieson
Coroners Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh Street
Southbank VIC 3006

5 December 2024

Dear Coroner Jamieson,

By Email: cpuresponses@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au

Investigation into the death of Russell Hewat

Your Ref: COR 2021 006058

Our Ref: #528

Thank you for your letter dated 5 September 2024 regarding the Finding with Inquest into the death of Russell Hewat.

I echo my previous condolences to Russell Hewat's family, and in particular, his foster mother, Suzanne Stewart, whom I understand was highly supportive of Russell. Aruma support workers had the pleasure of working closely with Russell over several years and remember him fondly.

Aruma Services Limited (**Aruma**) has considered your recommendations and determined what responses might improve the effectiveness of handovers between staff and reduce the likelihood of participants' deteriorating health not being recognised or escalated.

Aruma has responded to the recommendations below:

- 1. With the aim of promoting health and safety in the supported independent living disability sector where this vulnerable cohort are dependent on others for care, I recommend that Aruma Disability Services advance, without further delay, the implementation of a handover policy that is both rigorous and supports its workforce to effectively handover shifts by providing appropriate compensation to facilitate this handover crossover time.***

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Background

Aruma adopts an approach that supports proactive improvement and review of its processes. Following Russell's death, and in the course of the Coroner's investigations (and the Inquest), Aruma actively considered how handovers could be improved during the course of the investigation and following the conclusion of the Inquest.

Shift Handover Guidelines

Shift Handover Guidelines (**the Guidelines**) were developed and published to Aruma's Policy Hub in April 2024. The Guidelines frame the consistent approach to the handover of information to staff from staff on outgoing shifts to staff on oncoming shifts in order to promote continuity of supports provided to participants by support workers. The Guidelines direct support workers to record handover notes in a physical communication book, and provides a template form which can be printed and included in the communication book. The Guidelines also outline a discrete approach to inducting agency staff and promoting two-way communication regarding important participant updates. Additionally, the Guidelines outline the circumstances when face-to-face handovers are indicated.

The Shift Handover Guidelines were announced to staff via the Policy Highlights section of the Policy Hub. They were promoted via line of business Policy and Practice Updates Newsletters which were emailed to frontline managers in early May 2024 along with a request for them to present the content at a support team meeting. Requirements and the changes to be implemented in line with the Guidelines were also discussed with managers at the May Policy & Practice education sessions.

Electronic platform for shift handovers

Following the Cornial Inquest to Russel Hewat, Aruma has continued to uplift how information is provided between staff when commencing and completing shifts in disability supported living homes. Aruma is currently trialling an electronic solution, sitting within SharePoint for entering, storing and reviewing shift handover notes to ensure complete and accurate information is provided between staff when supporting vulnerable individuals. This will replace the recording of handover notes in the communication book. The trial is being conducted across 24 sites. Importantly, by adopting an electronic system, Aruma will be better placed to oversee compliance with the Guidelines on shift handovers. SIL managers will have responsibility for overseeing record completeness, and samples will be randomly sampled by the Quality Safeguarding and Practice team. Data collected will be included in a report to management, including whether improvements are needed as part of a Site Improvement Plan.

The new electronic approach has been consulted with staff and wider implementation is imminent, this will be embedded in all 330 Disability Accommodation sites managed by Aruma from 1 December 2024 and is anticipated to be completed by February 2025.

Use of the system will be supported by an instructional video that will be included in staff induction and refresher training annually for all staff working in a home and

living site. Currently the utilisation of agency staff across Aruma's 330 disability accommodation sites is 1%. Agency staff will be provided access to the relevant Share Point folders when completing the Agency Onboarding Process and an instructional video will be sent to staff on their expectations in relation to handovers, prior to them attending the Aruma site.

Cost modelling for handovers

Cost modelling was completed to understand the fiscal impact of implementing a 15-minute handover:

- a) Across all sites; and
- b) Across the sites where individuals reside with High Intensity Needs.

The modelling carried out in respect of the recommendation to compensate handover crossover time of 15 minutes demonstrated that such a change would be unfeasible. The cost of funding additional time for handovers, which is not currently supported by the National Disability Insurance Agency (**NDIA**), would be detrimental for the sustainability of providers such as Aruma. As a human rights focused organisation, Aruma is committed to advocating for the rights of individuals it supports and will continue to advocate funding for this fundamental service need to the NDIA.

2. *With the aim of promoting health and safety in the supported independent living disability sector where this vulnerable cohort are dependent on Disability Support Workers who are not medically trained and hold only a basic First Aid Certificate, I recommend the Aruma Disability Services Implement and mandate training on escalation – escalation on the type of situations and/or change in conditions that should be escalated by disability support workers.*

Aruma accepts the recommendation.

Aruma has introduced new tools and updated existing ones to assist staff to recognise and escalate deteriorating health. This includes:

- a) **STOP AND WATCH Poster** – introduced to alert staff to common and sometimes subtle signs of deteriorating health. Managers have been requested to place the poster where their staff will routinely see it and be prompted to observe for relevant signs so they can take appropriate action.
- b) **Communication Profile** – has been updated and includes a section for participants with complex communication support needs. It captures information about how they display various emotions, including how they show when they are in pain or distress.
- c) **Pain Chart** – introduced to support staff to observe for and document when a participant is in pain and what they have done to address this.

- d) **Skin Integrity Chart** – has been updated to permit improved documentation of skin integrity concerns and what staff have done in response to these concerns.
- e) **Managing Deteriorating Health Procedure** has been updated to frame the use of these tools.

The above updates have been communicated to staff via the Aruma intranet Policy Hub. All staff have been alerted to the updates via a 'pop-up' box on the intranet home page when it is first opened. Frontline managers will receive a further prompt about the updates via the Policy and Practice Update Newsletter which will be emailed to them in early December 2024.

An informational video has been developed to apprise staff of the key updates. It outlines the forms and their intended use and reiterates the importance of staff recognising and responding to signs of health deterioration and handing on key information to staff on oncoming shifts. The video has been emailed to all Home and Living Service Managers with a directive to show the video to their staff at their next team meeting.

The informational video will be incorporated into Aruma's Mandatory and Refresher learning schedules as of January 2025. The video has been classified as 'role required' training, which frontline staff must complete before they can be rostered for shifts.

A comprehensive e-learning module will be developed for all frontline staff in early 2025 and will also be classified as 'role required'. The module will upskill staff in how to provide safe health supports and will reiterate the importance of identifying and addressing signs of health deterioration and handing on key information to staff on oncoming shifts to promote continuity of supports.

Aruma is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the recommendations.

Yours sincerely



Dr Martin Lavery
Chief Executive Officer