

**Issue Number:** 4

**Review Date:** May 2024

The services The Wellness Initiative provides are considered *essential* during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. To reduce the amount of people presenting to state emergency departments and hospital admissions due to mental health crises, *The Wellness Initiative* will continue to provide in-person supports, where possible. To be able to provide our staff with a safe working environment, the following procedure has been developed following the Australian Government Department of Health and the NDIS Commission requirements for services and will be in place until otherwise instructed by those authorities. If a staff member is choosing to not adhere to this procedure, they are not respecting the essential importance of the participants' safety, as well as their own; and *The Wellness Initiative* will consider this as misconduct and the Misconduct Procedure will be enacted.

This procedure is always subject to the law and any directives issued by any government or relevant regulatory authority, which take precedence to and override this procedure to the extent of any inconsistency.

## **Procedure**

### **Symptoms of COVID-19**

The following are symptoms of COVID-19:

- Fever
- Coughing
- Sore throat
- Fatigue
- Shortness of breath
- Runny nose and/or congestion
- Loss of smell or taste

### **Provisions for Staff during COVID-19 Pandemic**

*The Wellness Initiative* will provide all staff with the following provisions to maintain safe working conditions and reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19 between staff members and participants:

- World Health Organisation-grade hand sanitiser



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- Re-usable and/or washable fabric face masks
- Disposable facemasks when available
- Hand soap

Staff can collect refills of the above when required. Workers can also opt to get a reimbursement for these items if they cannot easily organise to pick them up in a timely manner.

### Precautions Prior to Engagement by The Wellness Initiative

Prior to a staff member beginning supports with a participant, *The Wellness Initiative* will have the following safety checks in place:

- COVID-19-related questions asked on the *Peer Support Screening Survey* prior to initial meeting
- COVID-19-related questions asked on the *Safety Form* developed at an Initial Meeting
- Initial meetings are not considered an essential part of *The Wellness Initiative's* service and are to be put on hold in situations where a lockdown occurs. Only for exceptional circumstances will an initial meeting go ahead (for example, if the participant has no other supports/services in place) and it must be at the approval of a Founder. If this is to occur then all below safety processes are to be adhered to.

### Staff Requirements to Work

It is a requirement that all staff adhere to the following (unless updated by a Founder of *The Wellness Initiative*):

- Always follow the mandatory health advice provided by the WA Government and the Department of Health in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Staff are to immediately inform the On Call Person if they themselves experience any symptoms related to COVID-19, including if they have already begun a support session with a participant. It will be considered Misconduct for keeping this information from a Founder and the *Misconduct Procedure* will be followed.
- Staff must not provide in-person supports if they experience the above-mentioned symptoms.

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- Staff must follow the guidance of the Government advice and adhere to the recommendations for returning to work if they have been travelling interstate or overseas to locations that may require isolation and/or self-isolation.
- Staff must not provide in-person supports if they have been exposed to COVID-19 or are considered a “close contact”, as per the WA Government recommendations.
- Where/when relevant, it is the responsibility of the staff member to keep up to date with exposure sites listed on <https://www.healthywa.wa.gov.au/COVID19locations>
- Staff must not attend any in-person meetings if they experience the above-mentioned symptoms.

### Returning to Work following Symptoms and/or Exposure

Staff are to have any respiratory symptoms subside and to also have completed a seven-day isolation from the time of their positive COVID-19 test result, as per the current WA Government recommendations, to return to working with participants and to attend any in-person meetings for work (a negative test result is not required in this instance).

PCR tests can be accessed via the COVID Testing Clinics in the community by the WA Government. Sites can be located through this link -

<https://www.healthywa.wa.gov.au/COVIDclinics>

When relevant, *The Wellness Initiative* will accept a screenshot from the staff member showing the SMS with a negative test result confirmation.

It is currently not a mandatory requirement by the NDIS for *The Wellness Initiative* to have Rapid Antigen Tests as a form of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) however Founders understand the stress caused by not having regular income and not being able to provide in-person supports and may aim to have a limited supply in stock, when required. It is a staff member's responsibility to have access to their own supply of Rapid Antigen Tests (purchasing their own), however staff may request a Rapid Antigen Test from a Founder, if they are available, and collect.



## **Expectations of Staff to Provide In-Person Supports**

In order to continue providing in-person supports, the following is to be adhered to (unless updated by a Founder of *The Wellness Initiative*):

- Staff supporting participants in supported accommodations, in health care facilities and hospitals are required to follow their rules around PPE (incl. mask wearing) at all times.
- Staff will, as a minimum, wash their hands and/or use hand sanitiser as soon as they arrive to a participant's home and right before they leave.
- Staff are required to wear a mask when providing support sessions inside, if the participant requests it.
- When working outside, staff will aim to keep a minimum 1.5 metre distance between participants and themselves. Staff are required to put on a mask when they are unable to do this, if the participant requests this.
- Staff have the right to wear a mask during supports if they wish to do so.
- Staff will ask participants prior to entering the home if they, or any member of the household, has been feeling unwell.
- Staff will execute their right to end an in-person support if they observe any symptoms from a participant, or anyone else in the household, that resembles COVID-19 symptoms.
- Staff members will wear masks when they transport a participant in their cars. It is further encouraged that the participant sits in the car in the back on the left hand side. A staff member has the right to require a participant to wear a mask in their vehicle and has the right to deny the transportation of a participant who refuses.

*The Wellness Initiative* encourages its staff and participants to have open, honest and respectful communication about their own comfort level around protecting themselves from COVID-19. *The Wellness Initiative* acknowledges that we are all different with unique physical and mental health; and it is important that everyone feels their personal safety is a priority at work and when receiving support.

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### **Expectations of Participants during In-Person Supports**

Staff should all be aware of the following expectations that *The Wellness Initiative* have for participants engaging with its in-person supports during this time. In order to continue providing in-person supports, the following is to be adhered to (unless updated by a Founder of *The Wellness Initiative*):

- Participants will aim to maintain a safe distance of 1.5 metres at all times during support sessions.
- Participants will execute their right to end in-person supports if a staff member shows any symptoms related to COVID-19 and are to inform *The Wellness Initiative* if this has occurred.

### **Participants experiencing Symptoms and/or Exposure**

In order to continue providing in-person supports, the following is to be adhered to (unless updated by a Founder of *The Wellness Initiative*):

- Staff will execute their right to end an in-person support if they observe any symptoms from a participant, or anyone else in the household, that resemble COVID-19 symptoms.
- Participants must cancel their in-person supports if they have any symptoms of, or have been deemed a close contact, as per stated on the Department of Health website.
- Participants have the right to request online and/or phone supports as an alternative to in-person supports.
- Participants are to have any relevant respiratory symptoms subside and to also have completed seven days isolation in order to return to in-person support sessions.

If a participant is experiencing symptoms and/or been a close contact (as set out by the Department of Health guidelines) and they require support over and above phone and/or online support due to exceptional circumstances, then a *Deviation of Service Agreement Form* must be completed and approved by a Founder for any alternatives to be considered.

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### **Online and Phone Supports**

Participants and/or staff who are unable to engage with in-person supports can arrange supports to continue over the phone or online using Zoom. If a support is moving to phone and/or online support sessions, staff are required to spread out the total hours allocated for that session throughout the week. For example, if a staff member traditionally sees a participant for three-hours in-person, then they are required to organise three one-hour phone/online support sessions, unless otherwise stated by the participant.

### **Documentation Reporting Requirements**

The following states the requirements for documentation processes regarding COVID-19 at *The Wellness Initiative*:

- If a participant or worker expresses having any symptoms described above and/or have been a close contact then management is required to document this in their associated notes. The result of a PCR and/or Rapid Antigen Test will also be documented in their relevant notes.
- If relevant, if there is a confirmed case of COVID-19 from a participant and/or worker then management is required to complete a *Hazard Incident Form*. Management is also required to inform the NDIS via a *Notification of Event Form – COVID-19* which can be found on the NDIS website.

### **Government Support for Staff**

If a staff member finds that they are struggling with any loss of income due to the procedure then they can either access their leave entitlements (if relevant) and/or are encouraged to look into support from the following:

- [Crisis Payment - Services Australia](https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/crisis-payment-for-national-health-emergency-covid-19)  
<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/crisis-payment-for-national-health-emergency-covid-19>

More information can be found on the following website:  
<https://covid19help.com.au/find-help/financial-support/>



## COVID-19 Procedure

### Relevant Documents

Peer Support Worker Screening Survey    Safety Form

Hazard Incident Form    Staff and Participant Notes

Misconduct Procedure    Deviation of Service Agreement Form

*Notification of Event Form – COVID-19:*  
found on the NDIS website.

### Relevant Policies

Personal Choice: Person-Centred Practice	Personal Choice: Ability to Changing Services
Community: Safety as a Priority	Heart: Using Heart in Safety and Risk
NDIS Practice Standard: Risk Management	

### References

<https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/resources/coronavirus-covid-19-information>  
[https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/articles/a\\_e/coronavirus](https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/articles/a_e/coronavirus)