

THE REPATRIATION OF THOSE RELOCATED OUT OF CANTERBURY AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE

The Need for Relocation

Many residential care facilities were badly damaged in the Christchurch earthquake on February 22nd 2011 and several were destroyed. In total Canterbury lost over 600 residential care beds and 500 people were displaced from where they were living and receiving care. The safety and welfare of this vulnerable group of people was, and remains, paramount to the Canterbury District Health Board.

In order to urgently provide safe ongoing care to those displaced from residential care facilities approximately 300 people had to be relocated to facilities in other parts of New Zealand.

Whilst most people that we have spoken to were happy that they or their family member were moved somewhere safe, we acknowledge that relocation has been a stressful event that has been upsetting for many of the people concerned.

Repatriation - Returning to Canterbury

The Canterbury District Health Board is committed to repatriating back to Canterbury each person that was relocated (as a result of the earthquake) and wants to return. As of May 1st, where possible, at least 20% of available vacant aged residential care beds are being set aside to achieve this. The reality is, however, that there are significantly fewer beds available today than there were before the earthquake and it is therefore necessary to prioritise, on a case by case basis, the order in which individuals will be offered beds.

Prioritising Needs

An expert group comprising older persons' health clinicians, general practice clinicians, aged care advocates and an ethicist has provided guidelines for the prioritisation process and have developed the prioritisation criteria that will be used.

The guidelines require all decisions to:

- Minimise harm – the safety of vulnerable people is paramount
- Be fair – all decisions must be consistent
- Maintain people's rights
- Be compassionate
- Maintain care standards

The prioritisation criteria are considerations that will ensure that the clinical, social and compassionate needs of each person in care are taken into account. These considerations include the following:

- The person has expressed a strong desire to return to Canterbury; the wishes of the person in care are paramount.

- The relocation (transportation) will not create harm or the person in care or family understand and accept the risk of relocation
- There are compassionate grounds for repatriation such as an end-of-life situation. It should be a priority for the person and their family/friends to be together, however it may be possible or preferable in some situations for the family/friends to travel to the relocation destination
- The original facility in Canterbury has been repaired.
- The location of their family and/or social support is having an adverse impact on the person and re-locating to another district (other than Canterbury) would not assist
- The location of the person outside of Canterbury presents difficulties for their close family members. For instance, the immediate family is prevented from travelling to visit due to their own personal circumstances or they have difficulties communicating

Please be aware that if the person in care decides to remain residing in a facility outside of Canterbury the family of the person will no longer be eligible for travel assistance to visit.

Next Steps for Those Relocated and Their Families

As part of the prioritisation process clinical staff from the Canterbury District Health Board's Repatriation Team will soon be contacting the people who were relocated and their families or legal guardians to ascertain their needs and wishes. The Repatriation Team will then provide information to a Decision Panel who has the responsibility of determining each relocated person's priority level for repatriation back to Canterbury.

The decision of this panel will be communicated to the relocated person and their family or legal guardian. Should the relocated person or their family or legal guardian feel there has been an error in the information provided to the panel or feel their needs and wishes have not been fully heard then they can request an Independent Review. The case would then be put before an Independent Review Panel drawn from the same expert group that developed the prioritisation guidelines and criteria.

Changing Needs

Should there be any change in the relocated person's health, needs or wish to return to Canterbury, they, their family or legal guardian are asked to please contact the Canterbury District Health Board Single Point of Entry team at Older Persons' Health and Rehabilitation as soon as possible.

Single Point of Entry Team: Monday - Friday (03) 337 7765

ophspoe@cdhb.govt.nz

Support

All consumers of health and disability services have the right to access the support of an advocate. If at any stage in the above process the relocated person, their family or legal guardian feel they would benefit from independent help and support, we recommend contacting the Nationwide Health and Disability Advocacy Service who offer a free, independent and confidential service to all consumers of health and disability services in New Zealand.

Nationwide Health and Disability Advocacy Service: Monday - Friday 0800 555 050

For More Information

The first point of contact for further information about the repatriation process is the Canterbury District Health Board **Vulnerable Persons Team: Monday - Friday (03) 337 8937**