

Introduced in April 2021 into Residential Care settings, the Serious Incident Response Scheme (SIRS) has been developed in response to the Royal Commission recommendations. The scheme is being rolled out to all Aged Care Services as of the 1 December 2022 with the intention that the scheme will help to prevent and reduce incidents of abuse and neglect in Aged Care Services.

SIRS builds upon responsibilities and obligations under Aged Care Standard 8 for providers to have in place effective risk management strategy systems and practices that enables us to manage and prevent incidents to our consumers and our workforce.

SIRS introduces the need to report specific incidents that occur “in connection with the provision of service” that are caused by the actions or inactions of the workforce. Reportable incidents under SIRS are:

- an incident that has occurred, or is alleged or suspected of having occurred, in connection with the provision of care to a consumer
- the incident has caused harm, or could reasonably have been expected to have caused harm, to a consumer, and
- the incident is one of the following types of incidents:
 - unreasonable use of force
 - unlawful sexual contact or inappropriate sexual conduct
 - psychological or emotional abuse
 - unexpected death
 - stealing or financial coercion
 - neglect
 - inappropriate use of restrictive practices, or
 - missing consumers.

What we should already have in place prior to December 1

We should all have a system in place to manage and prevent incidents within our service. This will include injury reporting, hazard or near miss identification and processes to investigate such incidents. This will work to prevent or reduce the likelihood of re-occurrence through our continuous improvement and risk management processes. Incident management does contribute as part of a workplace health and safety obligations as well.

We should be operating with a culture that allows anyone to freely express concerns they may have that could cause harm to themselves, other volunteers, staff, clients or the general public with the goal we can stop any negative impacts on people entrusted with our care by following incident management associated processes.

All members of our workforce, our clients and their representatives need to have an understanding of how they may report their concerns which may include feedback processes and incident reporting forms or other verbal or written communication methods. Your incident management policy and procedure should also be available for public viewing should a member of the general public request. Your committee or board should have processes to review and respond to any concerns raised and demonstrate this occurs through recording such reviews in the minutes of your meetings.

It is important to realise the current processes will remain such as non-response, but SIRS may influence reporting obligations that happen within that process. For the example of a non-response, if we have to escalate the matter to the police for a welfare check to be undertaken, it becomes a reportable incident under missing consumer and must be reported within 24 hours as a priority 1.

From 1 December 2022

The introduction of SIRS from 1 December 2022 will require the workforce to be aware of and undertake their obligations to report incidents they witness or are made aware of in the delivery of our service. This is where culture and leadership are critical.

Examples of what are and what are not SIRS incidents are provided below as a guide only:

SIRS:

- A volunteer is told by a consumer that the volunteer who delivered yesterday took a valuable piece of china from their home.
- A consumer expresses that the person they spoke to on the phone caused them distress yesterday about their menu due to the nature in which they were spoken too.
- Consumer passes due to an anaphylactic reaction after being given the wrong meal.

Not SIRS:

- A consumer to whom we are providing a subcontracted service through their Home Care Package with another provider tells a volunteer that their cleaner is stealing from them. We are obligated to follow our processes to record the incident, report it to the other provider and participate in their investigation processes. They will then be responsible for reporting the incident within the My Aged Care Portal.
- A volunteer injures themselves on a broken step at a consumer's house. We are responsible for following our procedures in reporting, investigating and putting in place strategies to ensure this is prevented from happening.
- We suspect a consumer is the victim of elder abuse by a neighbour. This would need to be reported through the appropriate authorities.

When your service is advised of an incident that falls under SIRS, you need to respond within the required timeframes depending on its priority under SIRS. This may also involve incidents where another provider raises an incident about our own service provision. The priorities are listed below:

- Priority 1 - must be reported within 24 hours of becoming aware of the reportable incident:
 - that caused, or could reasonably have been expected to have caused, a consumer physical or psychological injury or discomfort that requires medical or psychological treatment to resolve
 - where there are reasonable grounds to report the incident to police
 - involving unlawful sexual contact or inappropriate sexual conduct inflicted on a consumer
 - that is an unexpected death of a consumer, or
 - where a consumer goes missing in the course of provision of home services.
- Priority 2 - must be reported within 30 days of becoming aware of any reportable incident that does not meet the Priority 1 criteria as outlined above.

What to Do Next?

MOWQ will be issuing a range of tools to assist you with the readiness for SIRS, and this will include:

- A Webinar on 14 November 2022
- Information Posters to display in your service
- A short information video to educate your workforce
- A revised Incident Reporting form including SIRS requirements
- A revised Incident Management generic policy and procedure.

This shouldn't be a major change in practice on the frontline, but it does need a reinforcement of our culture within services to identify and report issues. If at any stage your service is confronted with an incident that you are unsure of how to respond to in any way, please don't hesitate to contact us here at MOWQ and we will assist you in resolving these situations.