

Foster and Kinship Carer Assessments during COVID-19

The completion of Foster and Kinship Carer Assessments during COVID-19

The assessment and approval of a carer's application is prescribed by the *Child Protection Act 1999*, section 133-135 and the Child Protection Regulation 2011, sections 22-23.

COVID-19 is presenting Child Safety, Foster and Kinship Care agencies and external assessors with a new range of complexities when needing to complete carer assessments. These FAQ's aim to assist in these challenging times.

Initial Carer Assessments

Where possible it is encouraged that carer assessments follow the standard processes outlined in the Child Safety Practice Manual, however changes required as a direct result of the Novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, such as social distancing and self-quarantine will change the way we approach carer assessments.

Where assessors are attending a carer home in person please follow the advice provided at the [Queensland Health website](#) regarding questions such as:

- Have any household members returned from overseas recently?
- Do any household members have any cold/flu symptoms?
- Are any household members in self-quarantine or home isolation?
- Have any household members have/had a COVID-19 diagnosis or has been in close contact with someone who has?
- Is there any other information about the health of a household member that they think the assessor should know about?

Ensure participants can wash their hands or have access to hand sanitiser when they enter the home and that the meeting is held in a section of the house large enough to enable people to observe social distancing measures.

Should an agency, external assessor or departmental staff member attend the carer

applicant household to complete a carer application please ensure all relevant documentation is completed at that time.

The following questions address issues identified if an assessor is unable to attend a carer household due to the impact of COVID-19.

How can we continue carer assessments when we cannot meet face to face with carer applicants?

The use of visual media can be utilised as a means of completing carer assessments. Visual media includes, the use of apps such as Skype, Duo, Facetime, WhatsApp and video calling or similar to visually communicate with carer applicants in order to complete their carer assessment.

Tasks that can be completed by visual media include:

- The verification and sign off of blue card applications
- Interviews with carers – the interviewer should be able to clearly see and hear the responses provided by the carer applicant.
- Household Safety Study (HHSS) – please note that all areas of the house are required to be shown if visual media is to be utilised to complete the HHSS, including outdoor areas such as pools and backyards. The use of visual media to complete the HHSS is to be noted within the HHSS.

This method can also be implemented when needing to interview and assess Adult Household Members.

Referee Checks can be conducted over the phone, as such there will be no changes in the processes outlined in the Child Safety Practice Manual for conducting carer applicant referee checks.

What if a carer is unable to attend a Medical clinic to obtain GP report?

Wherever possible a GP report is encouraged, however, should a carer applicant be placed at an unacceptable risk of obtaining a GP report by attending a medical practice or because of the medical response to COVID-19 a GP report cannot be obtained in a timely manner, the carer assessment can still be submitted with a rationale provided within the assessment as to why the GP report could not be provided at the time of submission. In this circumstance, carer applicants should be advised that a GP report will be required as soon as possible.

If a carer applicant has a long standing GP who has recent knowledge of the applicant's health and is satisfied to provide advice remotely, over the phone, skype or via email this can be facilitated.

To support this approach the Health and Wellbeing Questionnaire will need to be provided to the GP, completed with the aid of chosen remote communication and sent to the carer/assessor.

Prior to submitting a carer assessment, the assessor will need to ensure they provide a statement within the assessment if the GP report could not be completed and why as well as noting a GP report will be provided as soon as possible.

If the GP Report is not able to be obtained, the Health and Wellbeing Questionnaire is still required to be completed by the carer.

Renewal Assessments

Renewal assessments should be completed as per the Child Safety Practice Manual utilising, where required, information provided above in *Initial Carer Assessments*. Where additional information is required from external agencies, government departments and/or individuals including children and/or young people please ensure you follow the advice provided by [Queensland Health website](#) regarding the need for holding meetings by telephone, skype or similar where possible.

Do carers have to have completed all mandatory training before being reapproved?

Mandatory training is to be completed prior to any re-approval for carers. Agencies are to ensure they have processes in place to ensure the continuation of mandatory training, this may include the use of visual media apps such as Skype, Duo, Facetime, WhatsApp and video calling or similar.

Provisional Approvals

Where a person has been identified or wishes to be provisionally approved in order to facilitate an urgent care arrangement for a child or young person as a direct result of COVID-19, the general process outlined in the Child Safety Practice Manual should continue to be followed:

- Request urgent child protection, personal and criminal history checks.
- Complete Part 1 of the household safety study
- Complete the assessment report for provisional approval.

Where a provisional carer applicant is unable to obtain a GP Report, please refer to the process outlined in *What if a carer is unable to attend a Medical clinic to obtain a GP Report?*

Approvals provided where in-home contact has not occurred in the last 6 months

Where a carer approval has been made without any face-to-face contact in the carer's household over the last 6 months, the approvals will be provided for a period of 6 months only. The opportunity to physically verify inspections undertaken remotely will occur as part of any placement or casework and re-assessed as part of a 6 month renewal.

This information will continue to be updated where required to address any additional issues related to carer assessments in direct response to COVID-19 and the restrictions currently in place regarding social distancing and self-isolation