



Media Release. 18 March, 2020.

ANMF CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE STOP ON ALL NON-ESSENTIAL VISITS TO NURSING HOMES

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF), is calling for a temporary ban on all non-essential visits to chronically understaffed nursing homes, in a concerted, community-led effort to shield vulnerable older Australians from the COVID-19 global pandemic.

ANMF Acting Federal Secretary, Lori-Anne Sharp, said to properly protect nursing home residents, the Government must provide clear and consistent messages to avoid confusion amongst already worried residents and their loved ones.

“This Government is completely out of touch with the reality that currently exists in nursing homes,” Ms Sharp said today.

“How are chronically-understaffed facilities, some without a registered nurse, going to supervise visits, to ensure they are of ‘short duration’? This is totally unrealistic when we already know that care staff are rushed off their feet trying to meet the basic needs of elderly residents.

“Tragically, we have already seen three nursing home residents die as a result of the highly contagious virus COVID-19. Given we know that the vulnerable elderly are at far greater risk of mortality if they contract the virus, the Government must immediately stop all non-essential visits to nursing homes to prevent the spread and ultimately more deaths.

“It is critical that the Government mitigates the risk of COVID-19 spreading any further into chronically understaffed nursing homes by prohibiting all non-essential visits by residents’ extended family, contractors and group or lifestyle activities. We are experiencing a global pandemic which requires immediate direct action with messages that are communicated clearly and repeatedly to ensure the community understands.

“With dangerously low numbers of staff on duty in nursing homes, it will be extremely difficult to monitor visitations and ensure that advice on infection control procedures and new social distancing protocols are adhered to.

“Understandably, there will need to be exemptions on certain compassionate grounds for palliative care and end-of-life situations and those visitors should also be properly health checked and supported before entering the nursing home.

“Providers must ensure they have enough stockpiles of personal protective equipment (PPE) and hand sanitiser. Feedback from our members working on the ground in aged care is that there are unsatisfactory amounts and access to PPE.

“We understand that this is an extremely difficult and worrying time for residents and their loved ones, but if we are to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 and flatten the curve, everyone in the community has a responsibility and must follow the expert advice on social distancing and limiting contact with others, particularly for the health of older Australians in nursing homes.”

The ANMF supports advice for providers to have virtual and digital communications channels available for residents and their families to replace visits in the short-term and hope that providers ensure that there is the necessary amount of staff to guarantee this happens.

ANMF media release authorised by Lori-Anne Sharp, ANMF Assistant Federal Secretary. 1/365 Queen St, Melbourne.

The ANMF, with over 280,000 members, is the industrial and professional voice for nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing in Australia.

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