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Aged Care Royal Commission report due tomorrow: Changes desperately needed for improve staff ratios and resident care

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) Tasmanian Branch, alongside our members working in aged care, are eagerly awaiting outcomes from the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety due for release tomorrow, 26 February 2021. It is hoped that the recommendations from the Report will work towards providing much needed changes and support for staff and residents in aged care.

“Despite COVID-19 and the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, providers continue to cut staff and ignore serious workload concerns. This has a flow on effect for residents who are some of the most vulnerable in our community. The Federal Government must act to address the ongoing ingrained issues across the sector,” said ANMF Tasmanian Branch Secretary Emily Shepherd.

Unsafe staffing and skills mix can no longer be ignored. In a recent survey conducted by the ANMF Tasmanian Branch, of the over 150 respondents currently employed in aged care as registered nurses, enrolled nurses, and care workers, over 80% reported that staff to resident ratios were unsafe. Further 60% of respondents cited Work Health and Safety concerns in their workplace, ranging from mental health matters, burnout, and compassion fatigue.

“The survey clearly shows that those employed in aged care are overwhelmingly concerned with unsafe staff ratios, short staffing and unfilled sick leave resulting in workload issues and compromised patient care.”

Highlights from the survey show shocking examples of understaffing:

- “At times in my residential home we work 2 carers to 64 residents”
- “In my workplace we have 1 registered nurse to 52 residents”
- “At my workplace we have 1 enrolled nurse to 30 residents”

“Aged care facilities desperately need additional nurses and care staff to provide safe, effective care outcomes for residents. Not replacing sick leave results in the staff who are on shift working incredibly hard trying to meet the needs of the residents in their care. However, those staff are

not superhuman and of course, residents miss out on their meals, exercise, and even being toileted in a timely manner. Providers appear non-plussed by the impact this has on staff and residents, not to mention the safety risks.”

The ANMF have been involved in every hearing during the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety and have made extensive submissions and statements on behalf of members.

The focus of these contributions has been:

- Mandated staffing ratios – minimum staffing levels and skills mix
- Legislated requirements for clinical governance, leadership and expertise
- Legislated transparency and accountability measures
- Guaranteeing workforce capacity and capability
- Registration of unregulated care-workers

“The Federal Government cannot wait any longer to take action on aged care. They called for the Royal Commission and they must now take action on the recommendations to improve the quality of life and safety for those vulnerable elderly in our population who rely on the aged care sector. We hope that from tomorrow real steps will be taken to rebuild a failing system.”

“End”

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