



Australian
Nursing &
Midwifery
Federation

URGENT ACTION NEEDED NOW IN AGED CARE
AMA and ANMF say Care Can't Wait

Doctors and nurses have united to call on the Federal Government to take urgent action now to prevent further COVID-19 outbreaks in aged care, warning that hotspots could appear in any State or Territory.

AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, and Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) Federal Secretary, Annie Butler, have written to Prime Minister Scott Morrison to express their concerns about the ongoing impact of the pandemic on aged care residents and staff.

More than 630 of Australia's 850-plus COVID-19 deaths have been in aged care.

"It's almost a year to the day since the AMA and the ANMF launched a joint campaign, calling on the Federal Government to act immediately to guarantee quality and safety in aged care," Dr Khorshid said.

"We called our campaign Care Can't Wait.

"That was four months before the global pandemic began to affect Australia. COVID-19 took the world by surprise, but its effects on the aged care system were entirely predictable."

In the letter, Dr Khorshid and Ms Butler say that recent increased funding will go some way towards enabling people to stay in their homes for longer and increase infection control for those in nursing homes.

"We remain concerned that the sector is still vulnerable, and that our members working in aged care face unacceptable risks of contracting the virus," they wrote.

Ms Butler said that even before the COVID-19 outbreak, the Aged Care Royal Commission had exposed the true severity of the significant and systemic problems in the system.

"It has suffered from chronic and widespread understaffing over many years and a lack of transparency in how funding has been spent, which is reflected in all aspects of nursing home operations and the standard of care being provided," Ms Butler said.

"There are too few nurses working in aged care, and nursing homes are overly reliant on lesser-trained workers, placing unreasonable expectations on them to ensure safe care.

"Our members have trouble accessing adequate personal protective equipment (PPE), and not enough attention is being paid to basic infection control systems and processes.

"Rather than waiting for the Royal Commission's final report, the Government must act now to resolve these problems, stop unnecessary suffering and save lives."

Dr Khorshid and Ms Butler called for:

- The immediate establishment of the nationally-agreed Aged Care Health Emergency Response Operations Centres (ACERC) to help prevent outbreaks,

- Mandated minimum staff-to-resident ratios and a mandated skill mix, with registered nurse presence ensured 24/7,
 - Adequate access to PPE, training in infection control, and reviewing infection control procedures,
 - National paid pandemic leave arrangements,
 - Increased funding for home care packages, and
 - More transparency and accountability in how aged care providers spend Government funding.
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