



**TIME FOR GOVERNMENT TO ACT ON AGED CARE STAFFING
 CRISIS – CARE CAN’T WAIT**

The AMA has called on the Federal Government to act immediately to fix the crisis in the aged care workforce, following the recommendations of the Counsel Assisting the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.

“Care can’t wait,” AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said today.

“The submission by the Counsel Assisting clearly identifies the need for minimum staff-to-resident ratios, 24/7 nurse availability, and mandatory minimum qualifications for personal care workers.

“The AMA has long been calling for these measures. We cannot wait until the Royal Commission concludes to begin fixing the crisis.

“The proportion of nurses in residential aged care facilities has declined significantly, while older people’s clinical needs are only increasing. This does not make sense.

“The AMA has consistently warned that the health and aged care systems are not equipped to deal with the growing ageing population, as Australians are living longer and with multiple chronic illnesses.”

The AMA also notes the Counsel Assisting’s concern of a lack of leadership and action on aged care issues by the Department of Health, despite clear policy recommendations to act upon from multiple inquiries and reports.

“The Australian people expect their aged care system to be staffed appropriately, so that older Australians receive the high quality care that they deserve,” Dr Bartone said.

The Counsel Assisting recommendations include:

- Mandating minimum staff-to resident ratios, and availability of registered nurses 24/7 in residential aged care facilities,
- Disclosure and reporting on staffing levels, with greater transparency for consumers,
- Minimum mandatory qualifications and a registration scheme for personal care workers, and
- The Commonwealth taking the lead on aged care workforce planning.

“The AMA supports the recommendation for mandatory minimum qualification requirements for personal care workers. Personal care assistants are crucial to aged care provision, but are not always equipped with the skills to perform their roles,” Dr Bartone said.

“Doctors, registered nurses, and other health professionals with the responsibility of caring for people must have minimum mandatory qualifications and are regulated by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). There should therefore be appropriate regulation of personal care workers.

“The AMA also welcomes the recommendation for minimum levels of English language proficiency as a registration requirement for personal care workers. AMA members who work in aged care have been calling for this for some time.

“Employing workers with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds can have benefits to aged care residents, particularly those from a CALD background themselves. Employers should support those workers to further develop and improve their English language skills.

“The AMA welcomes the Counsel Assisting’s specific calls for the Government to work with the AMA on a range of key workforce issues in its recommendations. As always, we stand ready to work to improve care for older Australians.”

As part of the Care Can’t Wait Campaign, the AMA and the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) are advocating for immediate action on:

- mandatory minimum staff-to-resident ratios, including ensuring sufficient skilled nurses in residential aged care facilities (RACFs),
- increased GP aged care Medicare rebates for patients to facilitate enhanced medical practitioner care of aged care residents, and
- expanded home care investment to allow more older people to stay longer in their own homes and relieve pressure on residential aged care services.

The AMA Submission to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety in September 2019 is at <https://ama.com.au/submission/ama-submission-royal-commission-aged-care-quality-and-safety>

The Counsel Assisting Submission is at <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/hearings/Documents/submissions-by-counsel-assisting.pdf>

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