

Aged Care: Where to next? Is there the *Political Will* to Fix the System?

In 2000, a Victorian nursing home was caught bathing its elderly residents in diluted kerosene as a treatment for scabies¹. The kerosene caused the skin to blister and rashes to appear over many residents' bodies. The scandal led to the nursing home's closure. It attracted outcry from the media and the Australian community. The Federal Government agreed to overhaul the aged care complaints system following an Ombudsman's report later that year. However, the account on 18 major inquiries and reviews into aged care in Australia since 1997 - the sector which provides services to about 1.3 million Australians - is still dogged by incidents of abuse and negligence (Topsfield, J. 2021)².

2018 to 2019 saw the release of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety Interim Report "*Neglect*" highlighting inadequate care and lack of transparency. The Royal Commission's Final Report "*Care, Dignity and Respect*" with 148 recommendations- was published and tabled in March 2021. It is scathing of the Aged Care system.

This long journey of inquiries has exposed the full extent of the problems in aged care with little to no change. Is it surprising people may well wonder if the system can be fixed at all³?

Take the workforce as an example: The Federal Government's 1997 Aged Care Act removed the requirement for nursing homes to spend a fixed proportion of their funding on direct care, including the salaries of nurses. A change NCWV and many other organisations, including the Australian Nursing Federation (Vic) strongly advocated against. It led to registered nurses being replaced by low-skilled care workers and an increase in nursing homes being run by private for-profit providers².

Recently advocates argued the estimated workforce would need \$10 billion⁴ to bring it up to the standard. According to Wood, E. (2021)⁵: Victoria has urged the federal government to introduce minimum staffing in the private aged care and made a \$40m pledge for the area only in last November. The State has legislated public aged care facilities to have staff ratios in the morning, of one nurse to seven residents, plus a nurse in charge; one nurse to eight residents, plus a nurse in charge, in the evening; and one nurse to 15 residents overnight. However, in the May 2021 Federal budget \$6.5 billion⁶ was allocated in five years and the staff ratio was not mentioned.

Recognising *Political Will* is required, NCWV, in applauding the findings and recommendations released in 2021 Final Report of the Royal Commission into Aged Care, will continue to advocate for older citizens to be treated with respect and dignity by receiving quality services and care and treated as valued citizens. This is a basic Human Right.

To read the summary and recommendations, of the "Care, Dignity and Respect " Report: <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-03/final-report-volume-1.pdf>

References:

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2. <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/24-years-18-inquiries-can-we-face-the-truth-of-aged-care-20210225-p575qs.htm>
3. "Will Australia's Aged Care System be fixed?", https://www.cotavic.org.au/news-items/older-people-speak-up-on-aged-care-royal-commission/?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=COTA%20Connects%20May%202021&utm_content=COTA%20Connects%20May%202021+CID_bd4bed599ab9e172f57c35c5d7fe6855&utm_source=Email%20marketing%20software&utm_term=Continue%20reading
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/may/23/labor-backs-significant-pay-rise-for-aged-care-workers-but-no-levy>
5. Wood, E. (2020), "\$40m pledge for staff ratios in aged care", THE SENIOR – VIC, Sunday January 03, 2021, Page 3
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/may/12/lbudget-2021-aged-care-australia-federal-coalition-funding-well-short-royal-commission-reform>

WHO DO YOU CALL.....

Seniors card	1300 797 210	My Aged Care	1800 200 422
Centrelink: Retirement	132 300	Aged Care Complaints Commissioner	1800 951 822
Disability, Sickness and Carers	132 717	National Carer Gateway	1800 422 737
Seniors Information Service	1300 135 090	Department of Veterans Affairs	133 254
Elder Abuse Helpline	1800 353 374	Employment Services	132 850