



26 September 2018

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
By email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Ms Radcliffe

Standing Committee on Community Affairs Legislation Committee: Inquiry into the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission Bill 2018 and related Bill

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) appreciates the opportunity to make comment to the consultation process of the Standing Committee on Community Affairs Legislation Committee: *Inquiry into the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission Bill 2018 and related Bill*.

The ANMF is Australia's largest national union and professional nursing and midwifery organisation. In collaboration with the ANMF's eight state and territory branches, we represent the professional, industrial and political interests of 269,000 nurses, midwives and carers across the country.

Our members work in the public and private health, aged care and disability sectors across a wide variety of urban, rural and remote locations. We work with them to improve their ability to deliver safe and best practice care in each and every one of these settings, fulfil their professional goals and achieve a healthy work/life balance.

Our strong and growing membership and integrated role as both a professional and industrial organisation provide us with a complete understanding of all aspects of the nursing and midwifery professions and see us uniquely placed to defend and advance our professions.

Through our work with members we aim to strengthen the contribution of nursing and midwifery to improving Australia's health and aged care systems, and the health of our national and global communities.

The timeframe for making a submission to the Inquiry into the *Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission Bill 2018 and related Bill* has precluded the ANMF undertaking our usual thorough process of consultation with our Branches. However, the ANMF has contributed significantly to the extensive number of reviews, reforms and inquiries to which the aged care sector has been subjected over the past few years. These submissions have been associated with reviews on the Australian Aged Care Quality Agency and standards for quality care, aged care complaints processes, and legislation and regulation relating to the aged care sector. As examples we draw the Inquiry Committee's attention to our submissions to the:

- *Inquiry into the Quality of Care in Residential Aged Care Facilities in Australia*,¹ and,

¹ Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, *Submission to the Inquiry into the Quality of Care in Residential Aged Care Facilities in Australia*, February 2018, Retrieval from:



- *Inquiry into the effectiveness of the Aged care quality assessment and accreditation framework for protecting residents from abuse and poor practices, and ensuring proper clinical and medical care standards are maintained and practised.*²

We have expressed concerns that these previous reviews have occurred in isolation, with little apparent consideration of the outcomes and recommendations as a whole. The ANMF has viewed these reforms as important, and maintained in our communications that there should be a mapping of all of this work to form a complete picture of aged care. Accordingly, the ANMF has considerable interest in the formation of an Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission, which brings together the Australian Aged Care Quality Agency, the Aged Care Complaints Commissioner and the aged care regulatory functions of the Department of Health.

Approximately 45,000 ANMF members are currently employed in the aged care sector. Many more of our members are involved in the provision of health care for older persons who move across sectors (acute, residential, community and in-home care), depending on their health needs. Being at the fore-front of aged care, and caring for elderly people over the twenty-four hour period, our members are in a prime position to see clearly the improvements needed to be made for people being cared for in residential aged care facilities and the community. Just the day before the Government publicly announced its intention to establish an Aged Care Safety and Quality Commission the ANMF released a statement³ saying that *Better staffing will fix the crisis in aged care*. In the statement, we maintained that

“...increasing staffing levels is precisely what will solve the problem for elderly, vulnerable Australians in nursing homes.

The aged care sector presents complex problems that successive governments have grappled with, unsuccessfully, for years...

They’ve conducted myriad reports, reviews and inquiries looking for complex solutions to complex problems rather than going straight to the core of the problem - chronic understaffing.

As we see, aged care providers continue to employ fewer and fewer nurses to care for an increasing number of vulnerable residents with increasingly complex medical needs. (From 2003-2016 the number of registered and enrolled nurse full-time equivalent positions in residential aged care dropped by 13%. In the same timeframe dependency levels of residents assessed as high care increased by 24.6%).⁴

In a sector which has been systematically decimated with regard to staffing for more than a decade, staffing levels have now reached a critical low.

ANMF members both in aged care and acute hospitals also know that there are many more preventable incidents occurring in aged care leading to unnecessary transfers to emergency departments and hospital stays.

http://www.anmf.org.au/documents/submissions/ANMF_submission_Inquiry_into_the_Quality_of_Care_in_Residential_Aged_Care_facilities_in_Australia_Feb18.pdf

² Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, *Submission to the Inquiry into the effectiveness of the Aged care quality assessment and accreditation framework for protecting residents from abuse and poor practices, and ensuring proper clinical and medical care standards are maintained and practised*. Retrieval from:

http://anmf.org.au/documents/submissions/Aged_Care_Effectiveness_of_the_Aged_Care_Quality_Assessment_and_Accreditation_Framework_Sep_2017.pdf

³ Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, Media release: *Better staffing will fix the crisis in aged care*, 17 April 2018, Retrieval from: http://anmf.org.au/media-releases/entry/media_180417

⁴ Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, *Nurses and Midwives’ Paycheck*, March-May 2018, Vol 17(2).



These are incidents that could have been prevented if there had been the right numbers of the right staff. This is exactly what could be provided if the sector had laws which mandated minimum staffing ratios.

Ensuring the right number of people with the right mix of skills to care for our elderly Australians is what can be delivered by mandating minimum staffing ratios and skills mix.

It works in our public hospitals, and it works in our childcare centres".⁵

Safe staffing levels in aged care in terms of skills mix and numbers of staff must be based on the care needs of residents and the time taken to perform interventions. This has to be the foundation of the new Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission's work, to provide safe, quality aged care.

The findings of a national survey on aged care undertaken by the ANMF in 2016⁶ "describe a systemic failure to ensure safe and adequate care to all aged care residents and suggest governments and providers are forsaking the elderly the dignity they deserve at the end of their lives." The major role of the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission will be to establish consumer engagement, complaints, regulatory and education functions which deliver timely responses and ensure quality and safety for elderly people, and thereby restore their dignity.

Should you require further information on this matter, please contact Julianne Bryce, Senior Federal Professional Officer, ANMF Federal Office, Melbourne on 03 9602 8500

Yours sincerely

Lori-Anne Sharp
A/g Federal Secretary

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⁶ Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, *ANMF National Aged Care Survey, Final Report*, July 2016, Retrieval from: http://www.anmf.org.au/documents/ANMF_National_Aged_Care_Survey_Report.pdf