

**The Secretary
Senate Community Affairs References Committee
Suite S1 59
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600**

Fx: (02) 6277 5829

Submission into aged care,

Please find inclosed my submission into The Senate Community Affairs References Committee, Section A of the terms of references.

Significant commonwealth funding is already provided for aged care services and yet providers do not have to adequately demonstrate they are spending this to provide appropriate nursing care and other needed services. Although recent additional Commonwealth funding has also been provided to help bring aged care nursing wages in line with those in the public health sector this has not been achieved. There is no mandatory minimum staff to resident ratio to ensure safe resident care. Poor pay and excessive workloads mean that there are significant nursing shortages in aged care.

There are difficulties in attracting nurses to work in aged care as it is widely regarded to be heavy, thankless work. Nurses working in aged care are paid less than nurses in other sectors, receiving up to \$170 a week or 25% less than their public hospital colleagues. Failure to attract skilled staff to the sector places overwhelming demands on those already working there.

Without improving wages and conditions, nursing groups say the sector will continue to struggle to attract or retain staff. The latest nursing workforce figures show almost 9% of the nursing aged care workforce left the sector between 1997 and 2001.

Other workforce studies have found 76% of nurses consider staffing levels and skill mix in aged care facilities are inadequate and between 70% and 85% of nurses are concerned about the accountability of the current aged care funding system.

It is imperative that measures are adopted to increase the number of qualified staff in the sector to cope with this rapid increase in demand. But it is impossible to attract people to work in aged care without introducing minimum staffing levels to ensure manageable workloads.

Not a single operator is required to lift their staffing levels, pay higher wages, or improve the quality of care delivered in their facility.

Of the total government funding, \$101.4 million has been allocated to provide training and professional development for aged care workers, including 1,600 undergraduate nursing places over four years, medication training for 5,250 enrolled nurses and provision for 15,750 aged care workers to upgrade their qualifications to enrolled nurse level. ANF has welcomed these initiatives. But will the increase in university places encourage nurses into aged care.

Wages for aged care nurse need to reflect the skills and experience they require, in order to attract people into the sector and to keep them there. The community needs to be made aware of the importance of quality aged care and to know it is not guaranteed, even by accreditation.

Quality care is dependent on a skilled workforce – to achieve this, providers should be compelled to spend some of this money on wages and extend the Australian Government rural scholarships for nurses working in aged care to urban areas.

QNU members have been given an extension of one week for these submissions.

D. Underwood

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