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Stop blaming aged care workers for government failures on vaccines - Providers and unions unite

Aged care providers and the union movement have united to reject the current blame shifting on vaccination, saying it is government failures that have caused low vaccination rates, not workers.

Providers and unions have been calling for fast action on vaccinating workers within the high-risk sector for at least six months, however the government's aged care vaccine program has too often led to disappointment, frustration, confusion and anger.

The Australian Aged Care Collaboration – a coalition of peak organisations for aged care employer groups - has joined with the ANMF, AWU, UWU, HSU, ASU and the ACTU to demand that the Morrison Government implement the five following principles into a rollout strategy that will support aged care workers to be vaccinated quickly and safely using the Pfizer vaccine only:

- Ensure client, resident and worker safety
- Government funded workplace vaccination and prioritised access to vaccination providers near workplaces
- Paid leave to access vaccinations and recover from effects or reactions if needed
- Targeted vaccine education and communication
- Transparency and accountability on vaccine data and supply

Aged care workers were told at the beginning of 2021 that they were first priority and would receive easy access to the vaccine in their workplace. This did not happen.

The only way to improve vaccine pick up is to make it easy for workers, not to shame them.

Aged care workers are some of the hardest working yet lowest paid in the country.

Aged care workers are at the frontline and delivering care to our most vulnerable in the middle of a pandemic.

Quotes attributable to ANMF Federal Secretary Annie Butler,

“We’re angry that the Government is trying to blame workers for its own failure to manage the COVID-19 vaccination rollout both in aged care and across the community.

“The Government has not been able to deliver on its own strategy, which prioritised aged care workers as the highest priority, and is now using a ‘smoke and mirrors’ game to pin the responsibility on the worker. But as we’ve seen with the latest COVID outbreak in NSW, the vaccine roll-out in privately-run aged care facilities is not a game. It is completely serious.

“The Government’s so-called plan for aged care vaccinations has done nothing but increase confusion and, now for relatives of aged care residents in NSW, alarm. Workers are still not guaranteed access to vaccines, whether on or off-site and there’s insufficient support or special leave provisions to manage possible side-effects or reactions and the need to take time off.

“The Government must finally listen to workers, their unions and providers - and act on our recommendations.”

Quote attributable to HSU National President Gerard Hayes,

“It is infuriating to see workers treated as a scapegoat for the Government’s vaccine failures. We need an aggressive education campaign that points out the benefits of vaccines and dispels myths. The federal Government should give the PR stunts a rest and focus on the substance of empowering workers and employers to get vaccinated.”

Quotes attributable to UWU Aged Care Director Carolyn Smith,

“It’s devastating for older Australians that once more we are at crisis point before serious attention is being paid to their safety and the safety of those who care for them.

“Since the announcement of mandated vaccines of aged care workers, they have received little information and a lot of cloudy messaging.

“There are reasonable issues that must be addressed to make this rollout happen.

“Yet once more we see the Morrison Government dithering and bungling while aged care workers – now in fear of their jobs after the mandated vaccine announcement – wait for the full details of the plan.”

Quotes attributable to AWU Queensland Branch Secretary Steve Baker,

“The biggest impediment to getting vaccination levels where they need to be in aged care isn’t workers, it’s the government. The Morrison Government has basically walked off the field when it comes to taking responsibility for the vaccine rollout.

“Our members in aged care do challenging and extremely important work and have been on the frontlines throughout this pandemic. They should be supported, not threatened.”

Quotes attributable to Australian Aged Care Collaboration Spokesperson Patricia Sparrow,

“Aged care workers should be a top priority. They shouldn’t be left to navigate the vaccine ‘hunger games’ like everyone else. Our workers are already struggling in a very challenging work environment in the middle of a deadly pandemic. It needs to be easy and simple for them to be vaccinated, protect themselves and their families and continue to care for and protect residents.”

Quotes attributable to Australian Aged Care Collaboration Spokesperson Sean Rooney,

“It is a national priority to do all we can to keep older Australians and the staff that care and support them safe from COVID19. Current events show how important it is for aged care workers to be supported to get access to the COVID vaccination as quickly and safely as possible.”

Quotes attributable to ACTU President Michele O’Neil,

“Aged care workers and their unions continue to be frustrated by the Federal Government’s failure on the aged care vaccine rollout, that has left their lives and those that they care for in danger. The Federal Government must act urgently to mitigate the risk at this critical time, before we see another wave of Covid-19 sweeping through the nation’s aged care facilities.

“We need in-workplace vaccinations and access to paid vaccination leave for all aged care workers.”

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