

Monday, 21 September 2020

Workers demand Action for Aged Care

Today the unions representing aged care workers and the ACTU have launched a comprehensive plan to fix our broken aged care system, protect workers who have been at the front line of the fight against the virus and provide better quality care to older Australians.

The HSU, ANMF and UWU represent workers who do invaluable work in incredibly difficult conditions but have been let down by a Government who has ignored critical issues in aged care.

Secure jobs for workers in aged care means better quality care for older Australians.

The document released today calls for the following essential changes:

1. Mandated minimum staffing levels and required mix of skills and qualifications in every residential facility, over every shift.
2. Transparency and accountability for Government funding.
3. Mandated training requirements (including infection control and ongoing professional development) accessible to all staff and paid by employer.
4. Government funding is required to be increased, linked to the provision of care and the direct employment of permanent staff with decent pay and enough hours to live on.

Quotes attributable to ANMF Federal Secretary Annie Butler:

“Long before the COVID-19 pandemic began, and as exposed by the Aged Care Royal Commission, chronic and widespread understaffing across the aged care system had created unsafe environments for both workers and those they cared for. The pandemic has now revealed just how dangerous understaffing is, with tragic consequences for far too many older Australians and their families.

“Now, more than ever before, the pandemic and its devastating effects in aged care, have demonstrated that mandating minimum staffing levels must be an urgent priority, as part of any lasting reforms of the sector. If that doesn’t happen, safe, quality care cannot be guaranteed and the pain and suffering of elderly Australians will go on.

“It’s time to make changes and prevent further suffering and neglect.

“Our members on the frontline of aged care know that having higher levels of registered nurses and care workers, in the right skills mix, will ensure provide safe, effective care to residents.”

Quotes attributable to HSU President Gerard Hayes:

“For too long the aged care system has relied on the goodwill of a highly casualised and underpaid female-dominated workforce that often retire into poverty.

“A properly and transparently funded aged care sector will lead to better pay and conditions for all aged care workers - only this will ensure the high-quality care that all older Australians deserve.

“This is an aged care crisis that the Federal Government talks about but doesn’t take action on.

“It’s time to get this right for older Australians, their loved ones, and the workers.”

Quotes attributable to Carolyn Smith, aged care director, United Workers Union:

“Our members tell us every day they are forced to make the choice between completing their tasks or properly looking after those they care for.

“They tell us the system is so broken and so understaffed their timetables don’t allow them the simple humanity of pausing to have a chat with people as they prepare their shower.

“The pressures on aged care staff leaves our members demoralised and burnt out, and helps explain why Australia has one of the world’s worst staff retention rates in aged care.

“The aged care system desperately needs a fix in the form of increased, accountable funding for better staffing.

“A funding fix would help our members give the quality of care due to the hard-working generation who helped build today’s Australia.”

Quotes attributable to ACTU President Michele O’Neil:

“In order to create a system which gives older Australians quality care, respect and dignity we need to protect the rights of the working people who care for them.

“Minimum staffing levels and a regulated mix of skills on every shift in every facility is essential for improving the quality of care delivered to older Australians.

“The pandemic has shown us that insecure and undervalued work leaves workers unable to provide the quality of care that older Australians should be able to expect.

“We need to ensure that one job is enough for any worker in aged care. Aged care workers having to work between multiple facilities has been a huge problem during the pandemic and must end.

“Privatisation is a failed experiment in aged care and has failed working people and the people they care for.

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