



Media Release

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Lifeline needed for aged care

The care and support of Australia's elderly will be improved only when funding is increased, Aged and Community Services Australia (ACSA) said today.

Responding to the Australian Nursing Federation (ANF) campaign to increase wages for members employed in the aged care sector, ACSA CEO Greg Mundy said without additional income service providers didn't stand a chance of meeting higher wages.

"Competitive wages for all staff working in aged care is the ideal but right now and in the foreseeable future it is fanciful without assurances of increased government funding," he said. "The ANF's call for nurse-resident ratios in aged care facilities is also an impossible goal and one not suited to the flexibility required to meet residents' needs. Indeed it is more likely to be another impediment to quality care.

"Even if funding was increased to more properly compensate staff, there still aren't enough nurses available to meet the ratios being demanded by the ANF. Setting these sorts of targets when there is an international shortage of nurses is setting the system up to fail. What we can do, and what we need to ensure, is an appropriate mix of staff to meet the varied needs of residents."

Aged and Community Care Victoria (ACCV) CEO Gerard Mansour said in response to Victorian media reports on aged care nurses: "The use of staff-to-resident ratios is an outdated system that does not accurately address the needs of a facility. The focus needs to be on client-centred care to properly match staff to residents' needs."

President of Nurses in Management Aged Care (NIMAC) Pam Bridges agreed that new models for caring for older Australians was essential. A former Director of Nursing and Registered Nurse, Mrs Bridges said the changes in the availability of aged care workers, low salaries and an overwhelmingly onerous system of regulation was taking a heavy toll on the industry.

"There needs to be a broader understanding of the normal process of ageing, what happens when we get older and what sort of care we need. For many older people, nursing care is minimal but they need maximum support to live their lives," Mrs Bridges said.

"There is no single answer, like nurse ratios. We need better systems to support and retain managers who are consumed by unrealistic expectations often at the expense of optimum care for residents. But nothing will change without realistic funding and real understanding of older people and aged care."

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