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Inquiry told RNs essential in aged care staffing mix

The NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) today appeared at the first public hearing of an Upper House inquiry into the role of registered nurses in aged care facilities across the state.

General Secretary of the NSWNMA, Brett Holmes, outlined how essential registered nurses are to ensuring quality of care for high or complex-level residents in aged care settings.

"It is imperative that staffing in aged care settings adequately meet the needs of residents and is of a high skill-mix to deliver the care required, anything less would be an abrogation of our nursing responsibility, as advocates for safe patient care," Mr Holmes said.

"The current law stipulates that nursing homes with high-care residents throughout NSW must have a minimum of one registered nurse on duty at all times and a director of nursing appointed.

"The intention of this minimum requirement was to ensure a high quality of aged care. If the requirement goes, it will open the door for aged care providers to self-regulate staffing, which could result in the removal of registered nurses entirely from shifts.

"We have spoken to thousands of aged care nurses and community members with relatives in aged care – we know what is at stake, if the responsibility were to rest entirely on the aged care providers."

The NSWNMA has been calling on the NSW Government to preserve registered nurses in aged care facilities with high-care residents, after changes to the Commonwealth *Aged Care Act 1997* (effective from 1 July 2014) impacted upon definitions within the NSW *Public Health Act 2010*.

In June 2014, the NSW Government introduced an interim measure to maintain the current requirement until it conducted consultations with the sector via a Steering Committee. A final decision, which rests with the NSW Minister for Health, is due to be made before the end of the year.

Mr Holmes rejected the argument by aged care providers for removing the minimum requirement to allow them 'flexibility of staffing', as well as the claim that there are not enough registered nurses to fill positions across the aged care sector.

"Aged care providers who want more 'flexibility' say the current requirement is too limiting, when in fact it's only a minimum – one registered nurse per shift in high-care settings," Mr Holmes said.

"Of course, good providers out there will continue to roster a registered nurse on 24 hours a day, seven days a week because they accept the responsibility of running a sound service.

"We have a moral obligation to make sure decisions to place our elderly in residential aged care facilities are supported by legislation which ensures access to sufficient numbers of registered nurses and appropriately trained and regulated care workers to meet the assessed needs of those elderly residents."



On June 24, the NSWNMA submitted more than 10,000 signatures on a petition which called on the NSW Government to retain the legislative requirement for registered nurses and the associated requirements for directors in nursing.

The NSWNMA has vowed to continue lobbying on behalf of registered nurses, enrolled nurses and assistants in nursing in the aged care sector, to ensure residents receive the highest quality care.

Details of the NSWNMA campaign can be found [here](#).

Further information about the NSW Legislative Council inquiry into *Registered Nurses in NSW nursing homes* can be found [here](#).

MEDIA CONTACTS:

Brett Holmes, General Secretary, NSWNMA 0414 550 324

Gia Hayne, Media Advisor, NSWNMA 0488 015 317