



NSW NURSES AND MIDWIVES' ASSOCIATION **MEDIA RELEASE**

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31 March, 2016

Unanimous support for registered nurses in aged care during Seniors Week

Organisations around the state have joined the NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) to support the need for registered nurses to be on site at all times in aged care facilities where there are people with high care needs.

Today, 15 organisations, including Council of the Aging (COTA), Cancer Council NSW, NSW division of Australian & New Zealand Society for Geriatric Medicine (ANZSGM) and Country Women's Association (CWA), have sent an open letter to the Minister for Health, demanding revised state legislation maintain the requirement.

General Secretary of the NSWNMA, Brett Holmes, said the significant move could not have come at a better time and confirmed the strength of both public and professional opinion.

"Changes to definitions in Commonwealth law mean revisions to state legislation are approaching. NSW Seniors Week is a great opportunity for us to send a collective message to the government to insist safe staffing levels are maintained and the skill mix is not diminished when those changes are made," Mr Holmes said.

"Aged care is one of the fastest growing industries and NSW has the highest number of residential aged care facilities in Australia, so we really need to be leading the way. This unified act confirms that we are not alone in our concerns about removing the requirement to have a registered nurse on site at all times for people with high care needs. Eliminating this minimal requirement will not only put pressure on our public hospitals, but have dire consequences for the most vulnerable people in our society who are often at the end stages of life.

"The government responds to the Inquiry into *registered nurses in New South Wales nursing homes* at the end of April, so it's important for us to gather support and send a clear message now. We're really hoping the state government will see the importance in maintaining the legal requirement to have a registered nurse on site at all times in NSW where people have high care needs.

"Around 165 organisations and individuals made submissions to the inquiry last year and over 25,000 signatures of public support were collected from members of the community, which clearly highlights this matter is a serious and important concern for those living and working in NSW.

"We hope this letter is the first step towards an ongoing collaboration that will not just benefit our members working in aged care but also the growing population of Australians who rely on an efficient, safe system to care for the elderly."

Many of the organisations who have signed the letter have also made submissions to the *Inquiry into elder abuse in New South Wales* and Senate inquiry into the *Future of Australia's aged care sector workforce*. The government's response to the Senate inquiry is scheduled for 30 June, 2016.

The open letter is available to view [here](#).



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The Hon. Jillian Skinner, MP
Minister for Health
GPO Box 5341
Sydney NSW 2001

31 March 2016

RE: Future of registered nurses in aged care in NSW

Dear Minister,

New South Wales has the highest number of residential aged care facilities across all Australian states and territories. At an average age of 83.5, people entering these facilities are older and frailer than ever before, many with chronic and complex care needs. Living in a residential aged care facility is no longer a lifestyle choice, it's a necessity for people requiring around the clock care and supervision.

Currently, 80 per cent of all people living in long-term aged care facilities have been assessed as having high-care needs and these facilities appropriately receive funding at a high-care level. The *NSW Public Health Act (2010)* protects people with high care needs living in many residential aged care facilities by requiring aged care providers to have a minimum of one registered nurse on site at all times.

When the current state legislation is amended to reflect changes that have occurred at the Commonwealth level, it should maintain the provision of registered nurses in aged care facilities with residents who require a high level of care. Such a legal requirement is neither burdensome nor financially restrictive to providers, given they are already funded to accommodate high-care residents.

The NSW government has a duty of care to ensure there is no further minimisation or dilution of skill-mix within residential aged care facilities. There is also a moral obligation to guarantee people who reside in them who have high care needs are supported by legislation that ensures sufficient registered nurses and appropriately skilled and regulated care workers are on site at all times.

From extensive evidence presented to the General Purpose Standing Committee No.3 *Registered Nurses in NSW nursing homes Inquiry*, as well as during consultations through the Aged Care Steering Committee, it is evident registered nurses are pivotal to leading a high standard of continuous care within residential aged care settings.

We urge you to do the right thing for the 59,252 people living in residential aged care facilities throughout NSW. People with high care needs, living in a residential aged care facility, must have on site access to a registered nurse at all times.

Supported by the following organisations:



NSW Division of the ANZSGM



PALLIATIVE AGED CARE NETWORK (NSW)

