



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

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Aged Care needs more support to tackle COVID-19

The NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) has called on the Federal Government to urgently strengthen the level of support being provided to the aged care sector, in light of the ongoing coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

As one of the most vulnerable sectors to COVID-19, NSWNMA General Secretary, Brett Holmes, said aged care required further intervention to ensure additional resources were prioritised, including extra nursing staff and adequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

"If the Prime Minister and National Cabinet want Residential Aged Care Facilities to continue relaxing restrictions to visitors, it must facilitate extra support to these providers and insist they improve their efforts," said Mr Holmes.

"We've got a situation where many aged care providers have struggled to implement enough infection control precautions to tackle COVID-19, while others are doing the best they can, in the hope the virus doesn't emerge. There are genuine concerns that visitors will bring COVID-19 into the facilities.

"This has been exacerbated by an inability or unwillingness to ensure these facilities have enough basic PPE for staff, but also enough qualified staff rostered to continue the dedicated care to residents, as well as carry out the necessary screening of visitors. The Royal Commission has clearly heard undisputed testimony that there is inadequate numbers of qualified staff in Aged Care let alone during a pandemic.

"At a minimum, additional PPE and nurses are essential to allow the required screening to be undertaken, in the same way our public hospitals are responding to the risk of people inadvertently spreading the virus.

"Yes, some sites are practicing individual risk assessments within their facilities and allowing family visits to resume however, this is not consistent across the aged care sector and is ad hoc at best.

"In addition, many of our aged care members have indicated a heightened level of fear with regard to their own personal safety in the workplace, including anxieties about placing their own families at risk.

"They are increasingly worried about the risks to the residents. Many are also fearful of becoming sick themselves, given access to any special leave provisions is inconsistent between aged care employers.

"Aged care nurses and carers are compassionate, hardworking individuals who take pride in their work, their facilities and often develop great relationships with residents' families. They want to keep everyone safe.

"In light of COVID-19, all aged care nurses require the best support possible to manage and defeat the pandemic. That support starts at the top, under further Federal Government intervention to support a sector that was already struggling under a myriad of issues prior to COVID-19."

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