



Joint statement

Staff shortage emergency: providers and unions call for ADF support and COVID-19 wage payment

Aged care providers and unions have united to call on the Prime Minister to deploy the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to provide emergency support and assistance to overwhelmed aged care workers at nursing homes across the country. Providers and unions also want the federal government to fund additional direct payments for staff to secure the workforce.

The escalating crisis in aged care has left services around the country reeling, putting care for older Australians at risk due to chronic staffing shortages. Older people are at risk of missing out on essential care because of this. Lockdowns are restricting many residents to their rooms as services work to keep them safe.

With severe staff shortages happening across all sectors, services for older Australians must be prioritised. There are services that older people depend on that are not being delivered simply because there is not enough staff.

- Aged care staff are burnt out with reports of widespread resignations.
- The sector is at crisis point and requires:
 - immediate ADF support where requested;
 - a COVID-19 payment for all staff; and
 - resolution of ongoing issues regarding access to RAT and PPE supplies.
- Current crisis exposes unresolved systemic funding and workforce issues.

We acknowledge Minister Greg Hunt's announcement yesterday that private hospital staff may be able to assist aged care. We await more details about how this will operate.

Over a thousand aged care services around Australia are already dealing with an Omicron outbreak. We expect many, many more to be affected over the coming days.

Aged care staff are exhausted and burnt out, with many working for days around the clock. Resignations due to fatigue and feeling undervalued have begun. This is just the beginning. There is no adequate staffing safety net.

To deliver quality care, we need urgent action from the federal government and a wage boost to secure the workforce in the form of a COVID-19 wage payment paid directly to workers.

Other measures are already well behind schedule, like freely available rapid antigen tests, PPE, consistent isolation rules, and visitation guidelines that balance social needs and infection control measures.

With so many COVID cases in the community, this situation will continue for some time. There is no end in sight yet, and we must plan for things to peak before they get better.

Aged care staff are working hard to provide care in very challenging circumstances and with limited resources. They are on the frontline of the fight against COVID-19, protecting the most vulnerable in our society. They must be resourced and enabled to win this fight.

We appreciate the patience and understanding of families and older people. Now, the most important thing is to get the support we need to deliver the quality care they deserve.

Union spokespersons and media contacts

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Australian Aged Care Collaboration (AACC) spokespersons and media contacts

The AACC is a group of six aged care peak bodies: Aged & Community Services Australia (ACSA), Anglicare Australia, Baptist Care Australia, Catholic Health Australia, Leading Age Services Australia (LASA) and UnitingCare Australia. Together, the AACC represents more than 1,000 organisations who deliver 70 per cent of aged care services to 1.3 million Australians, either in their own homes or in communal residential settings.

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