



OPEN LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER FROM AGED CARE PROVIDERS AND UNIONS

Dear Prime Minister

At the start of this pandemic the aged care sector and your government agreed it was a national priority to do all we can to protect older Australians, and the passionate and dedicated people that care for them, safe from the coronavirus.

Sadly, two years on and three waves into the pandemic, aged care is in crisis.

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety found that COVID-19 is "... the greatest challenge Australia's aged care sector has faced."

For the past two years aged care services and staff have been on the frontline working day and night in the most challenging situations, doing everything they can, often with limited resources, to keep people safe. Older Australians and their families have endured wave after wave of the pandemic. Our staff and services have risen to this challenge despite the huge cost to themselves and their families.

We have kept Government informed of the impacts of the pandemic on aged care services and proactively put forward solutions to address them. Although there is much that has been done to respond to the presenting issues, regrettably, much of the government's response has fallen short of what Australia's older people in care have needed. Older people, their families and our aged care workers are all suffering as a consequence.

Sadly, the tragic human cost of this crisis continues to grow.

You called a Royal Commission into the aged care system in to 'assure community and industry that there are no systemic problems' impacting quality and safety. The Royal Commission found that 'the Australian aged care system is unacceptable and unsustainable' due in large part to 'fundamental systemic flaws'. Most notably, with regards to a workforce that is undervalued, understaffed and underpaid, and services that are not funded to deliver all the care that is needed to the standards that are desired.

These fundamental issues which were cracks in the aged care system are now being turned into chasms by the pandemic.

Older Australians deserve better. Those who care for them demand better.

We call on your government to do the following:

1. **Workforce:**
 - a. immediately lift staff wages as recommended by RC and publicly commit to fully funding the outcome of the FWC work value case process
 - b. In addition to planned ADF support, immediately address critical staff and skills shortages
2. **Operating Costs:** immediately increase subsidies paid to services to fund the increase in new operating costs incurred for improved infection prevention and protection measures
3. **Resilience:** establish the proposed National Aged Care Covid Coordination Centre (NAT-ACCC) in partnership with States/Territory governments and the sector to ensure that aged care services are effectively resourced, enabled and supported to deal with future waves

As the pandemic continues, ensuring the staff on the frontline in aged care are resourced and enabled to effectively care for and protect older Australians is in your hands. As Prime Minister we call on you to work with us to resolve this crisis.

Union spokespersons and media contacts

Michele O'Neil President Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) Media contact: Peter Green 0400 764 200	Annie Butler Federal Secretary Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation (ANMF) Media contact: Richard Lenarduzzi 0411 254 390
Lloyd Williams National Secretary Health Services Union (HSU) Media contact: 0418 542 799	Carolyn Smith National Director Aged Care United Workers Union (UWU) Media contact: 1300 898 633
Mark Raguse Queensland Executive Officer Australian Workers Union (AWU) Media contact: 0400 338 721	

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.

<p>Paul Sadler CEO Aged & Community Services Australia (ACSA)</p> <p>Media contact: Zerene Catacutan 0422 815 248</p>	<p>Sean Rooney CEO Leading Age Services Australia (LASA)</p> <p>Media contact: Kate Hannon 08 6311 7809</p>
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