Shi Ying Liang

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Mr Ben Morton MP

PO Box 329,

Willetton

19th of May 2022

Dear Minister,

Hello. I’m Shi Ying and a 13-year-old student at All Saints’ College. As a resident of your electorate, Tangney, I am writing to you to urge the further importance of the quality and quantity of aged care workers across Australia and ask if you could additionally promote this imposing issue to The Hon. Greg Hunt MP [Australian Minister for Health and Aged Care].

As you would be aware, in 1997, the government established the Aged Care Act 1997 which is the ruling law that covers government-funded aged care and was the first package of reforms to improve on the funding, regulations, and rights in the aged care industry. Following this act, in the past few decades, there have been many changes in the budget towards the aged care facilities and efforts in improving the increasing challenges as the older population increases with around 1 in 6 Australians being aged 65 and over. However, while there are many different aspects important to the aged care facilities, two major underlying problems are the high resident to staff ratios, and the quality of said carers.

It concerns me that the understaffed facilities end up overworking their employees, which in turn leads to substandard care and more workers retiring early mainly because their pay doesn’t equate to how much work they’re putting into. In the 2020 Aged Care Workforce Census Report, out of the 2,217 facilities surveyed, 2,401 of them had at least one worker on call and/or on duty overnight every day for the last fortnight. Under normal circumstances, there would be separate workers and shifts for daytime, and night to ensure that carers have breaks or time for their own private life. But since the facilities are understaffed, many must fill in for those who are absent. This stress filled environment affects both the residents and the caretakers, even stated by a worker in an aged care Australian survey that the short staffing was the major reason for the crisis this system has faced.

As a member of a family that still has both sides’ grandparents, one of the main criteria my parents had to think about was the quality of treatment and attentiveness people receive at a facility, but it’s especially been emphasised over the past few years as new issues appear around substandard resident care. Found in the Royal Aged Care Commission 2020: Statistics and Government Actions Summary, at least 1 in 3 people accessing aged care assistance have experienced substandard services. In another case of 6,500 complaints reported to the government about aged care services, 2,300 reported there to be distressed residents, 1,900 knew of a resident that had been left soiled for an ‘extended period of time’, and 600 said that a resident was harmed due to lack of care.

I understand that finding solutions to stabilising the worker to resident ratios is difficult but attaching incentives to help encourage newer people to the workforce can be an easier, less complicated method to gaining numbers. These incentives can include more/extended annual leave to allow for more time to de-stress or free counselling hours to support their mental health. Another alternative solution that can be implemented is the division of the $18.8 billion-dollar five-year aged care reform. After reading the allocations of money towards different aspects of the, it’s great that $48.5 million is going towards training workers but I think more could go into the funding of intrinsically motivating more interns to become aged care workers. The government has already taken advice from our country such as the two $400 instalments in February 2022 and the increased minimum wage from $21.96 to $27 per hour (Inflation taken into consideration). However, after taking away tax, it’s left with only $22.72 hourly which is just over the average of $21.40. There can be so much more done to support the staff which is expressed in the many associations and unions who strive for better treatment of staff who are the foundation of a flourishing aged care industry.

Taking inspiration from Norway, their aged care models are slightly different from ours in Australia. Under our current model, short term aged care residents are dependent or rely on the services provided to them. However, in Norway, one of the aspects of their aged care is to encourage and raise expectations to how much the patient can do for their own health. They call this re-ablement. An interprofessional team filled with occupational therapists, social workers, physical therapists, and nurses offer rehab and support with daily household work, the patient knowing that this assistance will gradually withdraw when they’re able to independently complete daily duties again. If we were to let this model influence our aged care system, short term residents would be able to recover a lot quicker and adapt faster back into their normal flow of life, lifting more stress from worker’s backs.

Australia’s older population is growing faster as the years go by, and it’s vital that we treasure and preserve them. Their experience in aged care is just as important to their families as it is to the workers and both parties are affected if the industry is not functioning to its full potential. Please listen to the numerous unions and protests because most of them are doing it for a major cause.

Once again, I ask that you please raise this issue of understaffed aged care facilities to The Hon. Greg Hunt MP [Australian Minister for Health and Aged Care] for the future of the aged care industry.

Yours sincerely,

Shi Ying Liang