

PRESS RELEASE
16 October 2018



Urgent action needed to address aged care nursing shortage crisis

Government action is needed to address desperate nursing shortages in aged residential care facilities with an exodus of nurses seeking better pay at District Health Boards.

New Zealand Aged Care Association Chief Executive Simon Wallace says what was a trickle of nurses leaving in anticipation of the better conditions being negotiated under the DHB Multi-Employer Collective Agreement (MECA) for registered nurses, has turned into a torrent since the settlement in August.

“We’d already hit a record 10% vacancies in August with 500 out of nearly 5,000 registered nursing positions empty. That has accelerated and is simply not sustainable.

“Every day members are ringing and emailing me saying they’ve lost another nurse to a DHB because of the pay gap, and the vast majority are not able to pay their nurses more than they are funded for.

“We are in discussions with the DHBs and Ministry of Health to find a solution, but this is a lengthy process and the crisis is here, now.

“We need Government action. They have responded to the teacher shortages in our schools by committing to recruit up to 900 teachers from overseas. Why aren’t we seeing Government respond in the same way and bring in hundreds of registered nurses from overseas to ease the desperate shortages in our aged residential care facilities?”

The shortages mean some registered nurses are working double shifts, recently retired nurses are being pulled back to work, and clinical managers are taking on nursing shifts at night.

“We are also aware of at least one facility that has had to close a hospital wing inconveniencing residents, families and staff. And this is potentially what will happen at others.”

The pay gap is magnifying the already major impact on providers’ ability to recruit and retain internationally qualified nurses on visas due to 2016 immigration policy changes shifting aged care nurses off the Long-Term Shortage Skills List.

“Annual turnover of nurses has risen from 26% in February 2017 to nearly 38% as of August this year and has likely worsened since then. And there is no relief. Nurses are critical to delivering safe and quality care for our older citizens in residential care.

“Ultimately, it is our older people in aged residential care who will be impacted. The potential closure of specialist units as well as whole facilities will put pressure on the DHBs. Where else will these residents go?”

Mr Wallace says as well as working with DHBs, the NZACA is lobbying Government and Immigration NZ to return registered nurses/aged care to the Long-Term Shortage Skills List to help ease the nursing shortages in the short-term.

“But we need intervention now. This is a government that stands on empathy and compassion, when is it going to show some for our vulnerable older people and the providers that care for them?”

ENDS

For more information/interviews:

Alice Taylor 021 02785648

Link to NZACA Essential Skills in Demand submission
<https://www.nzaca.org.nz/policy/submissions/>