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**PRESS RELEASE**

**Nursing shortages reaching crisis in aged care**

Nursing shortages are reaching crisis point in aged care as record numbers leave aged residential care (ARC) facilities for DHBs in anticipation of better pay and conditions under current negotiations, compounding critical shortages exacerbated by a hardening of immigration policies.

NZACA Chief Executive Simon Wallace says whilst ARC providers have struggled in recent years to recruit and retain nursing staff, vacancies have now reached record levels of around 500 out of nearly 5,000 registered nursing positions in the sector.

“Effectively, we’re down by nearly 10% in nursing staff, who are the skilled employees we desperately need to provide safe and quality care for our most vulnerable older citizens.

“And we expect this number to escalate in the next six to 12 months, given an additional 500 nurses are likely to be recruited into DHBs through the multi-employer collective agreement (MECA) currently under negotiation.

“Where will these nurses come from? Not the graduate pool. They’ll move from the aged care sector, and already are. Potentially, we’re looking at being down by up to 1,000 nurses in a very short space of time. That’s unsustainable.

“The shortages are already taking their toll. I am aware of some of our members considering closure of their facilities or units in their facilities because they are unable to staff them with nurses to provide safe and quality care for the residents. This situation is going to worsen.”

Mr Wallace says the MECA negotiations are magnifying the major impact on the ability of providers to recruit and retain nurses from 2016 immigration policy changes - shifting registered nurses (aged care) from the Long-Term Shortage Skills List to the Immediate Skills Shortage List.

“This change has lowered the morale of our aged care nurses, making it even harder for providers to recruit and retain them. Our latest data shows that 38% of our members are facing increased difficulty recruiting internationally qualified nurses on visas since the policy change. And 65% are facing increased difficulty in trying to recruit New Zealand citizens and resident registered nurses.

“In fact, annual turnover for registered nurses in the sector has risen from 26% in February 2017 to nearly 38% as of July this year.

“This data spells a crisis for the ability of our providers to deliver safe and quality care for our older citizens, with potential closure of units and facilities putting pressure on the DHBs. Where else will these residents go?”

Mr Wallace says the NZACA is in meetings with DHBs and the Ministry of Health to figure out a solution.

“We are also asking them to support us in lobbying the Government and Immigration NZ to return our registered nurses to the Long-Term Shortage Skills List, to help ease the nursing shortages in the short-term.”

Ends.

Contact: Simon Wallace on 04 473 3159 or 0274 882850

Link to NZACA Essential Skills in Demand submission

<https://www.nzaca.org.nz/assets/Uploads/FINAL-ESID-submission-from-NZACA.pdf>