

MEDIA RELEASE

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Aged care sector welcomes Ombudsman's report

The New Zealand Aged Care Association (NZACA) has welcomed the Chief Ombudsman's report on inspections of six secure aged residential care facilities during COVID-19 Alert Levels 1 and 2 last year.

Simon Wallace Chief Executive of the NZACA says the Ombudsman makes some helpful suggestions and recommendations with respect to secure dementia and psychogeriatric care, an extremely complex and often challenging area of care.

"While there are some areas for improvements and we welcome the recommendations, it is pleasing to see his report cites many positive aspects of care provided by a very dedicated workforce during an unprecedented and stressful period, including the high levels of hygiene and safety, staff treating residents with dignity and respect and use of innovative strategies enabling residents to stay connected with their loved ones and the wider community."

Mr Wallace says the NZACA takes very seriously the Ombudsman's concerns around use of restraint in one case, where a resident was restrained in a chair for 11 hours with minimal breaks.

"While we are also concerned about this finding, the Ombudsman does acknowledge that use of restraint was part of the resident's care plan and that since his visit the facility has minimised uses for the resident and across the facility.

"Restraint may be considered in cases where there is a risk to the safety of the resident. It is important to note that restraint is one of several possible strategies only ever used after assessment and all other options have been trialled, and only in the most extreme and complex cases.

The report also found one facility had not kept thorough records of COVID-19 tests of residents. “We certainly take the Ombudsman’s point”, Mr Wallace said. “However, the fact is that very few residents were being tested despite our ongoing efforts calling on the Government to agree to mandatory testing of all new residents entering aged residential care facilities.”

Mr Wallace says the sector also welcomes the report’s recommendations around staffing and the need for investment in facilities.

“We would like nothing more than to implement his recommendations, particularly increasing our registered nursing workforce. However, the reality is that our care homes are continuing to lose nurses to District Health Boards offering pay packages care homes are not funded to match. And this is happening at a time when COVID-19 related border restrictions are limiting supply of migrant staff.

“We hope the Government takes note of the Ombudsman’s recommendations and ensures the chronic underfunding that is leaving the sector hamstrung is addressed.”

Mr Wallace says the NZACA also acknowledges that it did raise concerns around the timing of the inspections with the Prime Minister.

“We did not step away from our role as the voice of the sector and wrote to the Prime Minister expressing our concerns at these inspections being carried out during an unprecedented health crisis, when care homes were doing their utmost to protect staff and residents from the virus and preventing infection through limiting all unnecessary contact with the outside world.

ENDS

For more information

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