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New South Wales Parliament Legislative Assembly

Registered Nurses in NSW Nursing Homes

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I thank my colleague the good member for Wallsend for bringing this motion before this place.

It is absolutely imperative that this Government finally acts on the recommendations of its own upper House inquiry into the role of registered nurses in New South Wales nursing homes.

For the benefit of members in this place, I will record in Hansard the key recommendation of the upper House inquiry. Recommendation 7 states:

That the New South Wales Government retain the requirement in section 104 (1) (a) of the Public Health Act 2010 for registered nurses to be on duty in nursing homes at all times, and to amend the definition of 'nursing home' under the Act.

A change to the definition of "nursing home" is needed in order to harmonise legislation in the State of New South Wales with Commonwealth legislation in this area. Sadly, the Minister has been completely inactive and unresponsive to the calls from aged care residents, activists and the nursing profession for legislative action in this space.

Whilst the Minister for Health has put in place interim arrangements to see the industry through until the end of this year, we need to know what future action is proposed and then we need to see the Government deliver on it.

The hardworking, dedicated nurses deserve the security and assurance that only the Minister can provide with the legislative change proposed by the upper House inquiry. Moreover, the residents and patients of aged care facilities and nursing homes deserve that protection and assurance too.

We have a responsibility to ensure the needs of residents and patients are not lost in the race towards profitability, as we know will happen if private operators are not compelled by legislation to provide the highest level of care through the rostering of permanent, around-the-clock registered nurses. Without registered nurses, many more aged care residents would be sent to hospital emergency departments, placing even more stress on our already overstretched health system and causing unnecessary distress to patients and their families.

Registered nurses oversee multiple medications, including assessing any side effects, and they provide support and supervision to the entire valued nursing team—our wonderful Enrolled Nurses and our Assistants in Nursing.

In calling for action from the Government, I place on the record my gratitude to activists such as Jocelyn Hoffman, Shirley Ross-Shuley, Annette Peters, Louise Stammers, Peter Buckney, and Peter Lammiman.

These Blue Mountains nursing warriors do the hard work of caring for our elderly friends and families. They do tough physical work and they have medical and professional expertise that is among the very best in the industry. In their spare time, they work hard, alongside people like Jon Farry and Rita Martin at the Nurses and Midwives Association, to improve their conditions at work and to ensure quality care for their patients.

Jon Farry has been doing excellent advocacy work at the Nurses and Midwives Association [NMA], but he and his colleagues are being stonewalled by this Government at every turn while at the same time being forced to listen to the mealy-mouthed lip service from the Minister.

For example, from 2014 the NMA and other stakeholders had been meeting regularly to discuss the future of registered nurses [RNs] in aged care facilities and in nursing homes as well as any relevant legislative change that would improve patient outcomes. This was known as the Aged Care Steering Committee. In 2016 the steering committee put forward a report that contained a number of recommendations regarding the future role of RNs.

The NMA has attempted to gain access to the final report but has been blocked at every turn by the Baird Government. In March 2016 the association lodged a Government Information (Public Access) [GIPA] Act application, which is still being delayed.

This is obstructive and maliciously uncooperative behaviour from the Baird Government and it should stop playing games on this issue. Let us support registered nurses in our aged care facilities 24/7 for the sake of safety and quality of care for our teams of healthcare workers.

It is the dignified thing to do.