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MEDIA RELEASE

SUNDAY 30 MAY 2021

Victorian nurses and carers shunned: Scott Morrison fails to protect private aged care

The Morrison Government has failed to protect vulnerable people living in its residential aged care facilities and the dedicated nurses and personal care workers who care for them.

An aged care worker is one of five new COVID-19 cases announced by the Victorian Department of Health today and the Arcare Maidstone aged care facility is in lock down.

ANMF understands about 34 of the 110 eligible staff have received a first vaccination, including the worker with COVID-19, and 53 of the 76 of residents have received their first vaccination dose.

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (Victorian Branch) is calling for the Morrison Government to act urgently and with transparency – like it is a matter of life or death. The Morrison Government must:

- report on the actual national and state numbers, not percentages, of its aged care staff who have had one and/or two doses of vaccinations or none
- report on the actual national and state numbers, not percentages, of its aged care residents who have had one and/ or two doses of vaccinations or none
- publicise the dates when vaccinations are occurring and the name of the facilities
- immediately organise in-reach teams to finalise vaccination of residents and staff
- fund ongoing single-site employment beyond 10 June for the private aged care sector workers rather than reacting to outbreaks and potentially introducing the directive too late once infected staff have worked in multiple facilities
- implement fit testing of P2/N95 respirator masks for all aged care staff
- report on PPE supply levels it has ensured is provided for private aged care staff and residents
- report on the implementation of the Infection Control Prevention Lead positions, funding and completion of education in every aged care facility
- take over full responsibility for a surge nursing workforce when private aged care facilities have to furlough all staff rather than continuing to rely on the state's stretched nursing workforce to deliver the services it is responsible for.

Fifty-two days ago, on 9 April, the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (Victorian Branch) highlighted the Morrison Government's absence of urgency in its vaccination program for priority phase 1a aged care staff and residents.

Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (Victorian Branch) offices:

Ballarat Bendigo Geelong Melbourne Morwell Shepparton Swan Hill Wangaratta Warrnambool

ANMF (Vic Branch) Secretary Lisa Fitzpatrick said ‘The hindsight of almost 2000 Victorian aged care residents contracting COVID-19, 655 resident deaths and more than 1600 aged care workers infected was not enough to motivate the Morrison Government into urgent action.

‘We are absolutely livid because the Morrison Government does not understand its role of responsibility and oversight in its own aged care system,’ Ms Fitzpatrick said.

‘Nothing ever happens in aged care quickly, today is the day that go-slow culture must change.’

‘The Morrison Government has an opportunity over the last six months to be proactive and embed the necessary protections. Again today, playing politics has been more important than the safety of private aged care workers and their residents,’ Ms Fitzpatrick said.

In early April, 86% of 15,000 ANMF members working in private aged care – nurses and personal care worker – told ANMF they had not been vaccinated.

‘Instead of in-reach teams to vaccinate staff and residents, obviously on different days to allow for expected adverse reactions, the government told staff to organise their own with their GP or unopened clinics.

‘ANMF had to plead with the Morrison Government to handover vaccination to the Victorian Andrews Government so staff could attend the state vaccination centres and ensure that there was enough vaccine to cover them,’ Ms Fitzpatrick said.

The Federal Government has declared Greater Melbourne a COVID-19 hotspot and re-introduced funding for single-site employment from Friday 28 May until June 10.

Meanwhile, the Victorian Government’s 178 public sector residential aged care facilities and wards have remained on a continuous single-site employment directive during the pandemic with their staff completely vaccinated.

ANMF understands Western Health nurses will be filling the shifts at Arcare Maidstone while staff are furloughed. Victorian public sector nurses and midwives filled more than 5000 private aged care shifts during the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak.

‘Victoria’s public health nurses and midwives are exhausted and our hospitals, emergency departments and maternity services are full. The Morrison Government must take responsibility for its own surge workforce for its private aged care sector,’ Ms Fitzpatrick said.

‘They have to stop relying on the state to do their work for them.’

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (Victorian Branch) has more than 94,000 members – nurses, midwives and aged care personal care workers – across the Victorian health, mental health and aged care sectors.

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