

GPO Box 1307 Canberra ACT 2601

MEDIA RELEASE

Contact: Jan Horsnell (Deputy Chair)
0418 804 330
Sue Leppert (Executive Director)
0402 825 282

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Aged care overhaul welcomed

Anglicare Australia endorses the initiatives to help eliminate abuse of elderly people in aged care facilities, announced yesterday by Federal Minister for Ageing Senator Santoro.

The concerns expressed by the Minister at this week's Aged Care Advisory Committee meeting were echoed by Anglicare Australia and representatives of other health and aged care consumer and provider groups. Instances of sexual abuse and negligence are never acceptable, and all care must be taken to ensure that residents are provided with the best possible care, given with respect and sensitivity. Where instances of abuse or neglect arise, these must be acknowledged openly and dealt with immediately.

The Anglicare Australia network includes twelve organisations providing residential aged care. The Deputy Chair of Anglicare Australia, Ms Jan Horsnell, emphasised the fact that these organisations work hard to ensure high quality services and systems of care, and to minimise the risk of abuse or neglect of residents.

"Measures such as enhanced criminal record checks for employees, ongoing training and continuous quality improvement policies and procedures that include reporting and corrective action components are in place and regularly reviewed," Ms Horsnell said. "Where abuse or neglect has occurred (and these instances are rare), immediate action is taken. The health and wellbeing of residents and peace of mind for their families is the top priority."

The Minister recommended

- A uniform system of police checks for workers in the aged care industry;
- An increase in unannounced spot checks for aged care facilities;
- A review of the current Complaints Resolution Scheme; and
- Enhanced training for all aged care staff in relation to knowledge and awareness of abuse of the elderly and how to deal with complaints.

Anglicare Australia calls for a rigorous elder abuse policy framework to ensure these measures are developed with appropriate policies, procedures and guidelines, including a code of conduct. Arising from this would be a range of orientation training and regular training updates for staff at all levels.

The effectiveness of mandatory reporting remains to be demonstrated, but Anglicare Australia is open to continuing discussions about how reporting, awareness raising and training are best undertaken to ensure that no resident is at risk of abuse or neglect.

"Anglicare Australia appreciates being involved in these Ministerial discussions, and is keen to continue to assist the Minister to work through these issues," Ms Horsnell said.