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CARE FOR DEMENTIA SUFFERERS MUST REMAIN A PRIORITY, SAYS ACN

The Australian College of Nursing (ACN) is urging the government to better utilise nurses in the coordination and delivery of care for Australians living with dementia. The ACN’s call for the government’s commitment to reform follows the release of the recent Senate Community Affairs References Committee report Care and management of younger and older Australians living with dementia and behavioural and psychiatric symptoms of dementia (BPSD).

Adjunct Professor Debra Thoms, CEO of ACN, said it is now well recognised there is inadequate availability of specialised care and services for people with dementing illnesses. The Report’s recommendations must trigger the necessary service reforms to provide improved care; the nursing profession is well placed to contribute to these reform measures.

“Nurses can provide the connection between the system’s many users, health professionals and service arrangements while placing the patient and their supporters at the centre of care pathways.

“Community and specialist nurses skilled in this field of care are able to provide a coordination role, linking people diagnosed with dementing illnesses with other health professionals and social services, as required, thus helping to ensure that an integrated approach is taken,” said Professor Thoms.

Professor Tracey McDonald, ACN Healthy Ageing Community of Interest member, also encourages the Government to access the skill and expertise of the nursing workforce.

“A multi-disciplinary approach is fundamental to improving dementia care. Through their specialised knowledge, nurses are well-placed to take a lead role in the implementation of many of these reforms. Let’s remember, nurses are already undertaking valuable work in this area; fostering their learning and engagement will not only lead to better health outcomes and improved productivity but also makes sound economic sense,” said Professor McDonald.

In support of service improvement and change, the ACN recommends:

- greater utilisation of the nurse workforce in the coordination and delivery of care to people with dementia
- the development of health services and care pathways that seamlessly link people through diagnosis to interdisciplinary care
- the appropriate skill-mix of staff to provide for the complex needs of individuals with dementing illnesses and BPSD
- continuing education programs for nurses and other health professions related to the care of people with dementing illnesses and BPSD
• tailored care for younger people living with BPSD and dementing illnesses who often live in unsuitable aged care facilities
• well-targeted education for health professionals and carers to reduce the use of physical and chemical restraints and reliance on antipsychotic medications.

ACN will maintain a strong interest in the Government’s response to the Inquiry’s recommendations.

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For interviews with Adjunct Professor Thoms or Professor McDonald, please contact Diana Spencer or Felicity Zadro on 029212 7867 or diana@zadrocommunications.com.au.