



Hon Yvette D'Ath MP  
Minister for Health and Ambulance Services  
Leader of the House

- 8 DEC 2020

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Mr Neil Laurie  
Clerk of the Parliament  
Queensland Parliament  
George Street  
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

I write to provide a final response to your letter regarding petition number 3404-20, tabled in Parliament on 8 September 2020, in relation to the incorporation of virus safeguards for aged care facilities and retirement centres in the design and operation phase.

I note and share the petitioners' concern for the health and wellbeing of Queenslanders who live in residential aged care facilities. From the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the health of our community has been the Palaszczuk Government's number one priority. The Queensland Government knows that residents of aged care facilities are among the most vulnerable members of our community in the current circumstances. Protecting Queenslanders who live in residential aged care continues to be an absolute priority as Queensland navigates this pandemic.

The Australian Government is responsible for the funding and regulation of the aged care sector. Issues raised by the petitioners such as facility design, staffing ratios and staff training are governed by the Aged Care Quality Standards with compliance regulated by the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission.

Nevertheless, the Palaszczuk Government is taking strong action to protect residents of aged care facilities in Queensland from COVID-19.

Actions undertaken by the Queensland Government include:

- Implementation of Public Health Directions which impose requirements on residential aged care facilities in relation to entry, workforce management, use of personal protective equipment, outbreak preparedness activities and staff training to address the risk of COVID-19 being spread to residents while also having regard to residents' rights and enjoyment;
- Working collaboratively with stakeholders including peak bodies, consumer groups, residential aged care providers, the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission, the Commonwealth Department of Health, Primary Health Networks, the Public Advocate and unions to plan and deliver an effective response to COVID-19 for residential aged care;
- Development of resources to help residential aged care facilities to prevent, prepare for and respond to COVID-19 in residential aged care facilities;

- Development and delivery of multi modal training on infection prevention and control and personal protective equipment use to residential aged care facility staff;
- Development of disaster and outbreak response plans and protocols to ensure key stakeholders are ready to respond to residential aged care facility outbreaks;
- Additional funding to allow the Residential Aged Care Facility Support Service (RaSS) to extend its hours of operation to provide acute in-reach services to Queenslanders in residential aged care;
- Strong border measures aimed at reducing the risk of COVID-19 being introduced to the Queensland community; and
- Conducting COVID-19 preparedness site visits to all 16 Queensland Health run residential aged care facilities and its 34 multipurpose health services for quality assurance purposes in these state-run facilities.

The Palaszczuk Government is committed to the health and wellbeing of older Queenslanders and has demonstrated this in actions that predate the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, the Queensland Parliament passed the *Health Transparency Act 2019* (the Act). The purpose of the Act is to:  
 (a) improve the transparency of the quality and safety of health services provided in Queensland; and  
 (b) to help people make better-informed decisions about their healthcare.

The Act includes provisions that relate to the provision of care in residential aged care facilities in Queensland. As aged care is provided by a mixture of registered nurses, enrolled nurses and support workers (including personal care workers and assistants in nursing), the Act requires Queensland Health operated residential aged care facilities to have a minimum registered nurse skill mix and provide a minimum average hours of care to residents daily. In addition, the Act requires Queensland Health facilities to publish staffing figures publicly and encourages Queensland for profit and not for profit providers to report their average daily resident care hours on a quarterly basis. While providers can choose not to supply this information, their decision to opt-out will be made public.

The petitioners may be aware that the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (the Royal Commission) is currently underway and has examined the impact of COVID-19 on aged care. The Royal Commission handed down a special report and recommendations regarding COVID-19 on 1 October 2020.

The Palaszczuk Government recognises the range of important recommendations made by the Commissioners on COVID-19 preparedness and will continue to pay close attention to the Royal Commission's recommendations including its final report in February 2021. The Queensland Government will work with other stakeholders to respond to the recommendations of the Royal Commission in a way that supports the interests of older Queenslanders.

I trust this information is of assistance to the petitioners.

Yours sincerely



**YVETTE D'ATH MP**  
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