Media Release

Alzheimer’s Australia urges the Government to protect human rights in nursing homes

Behavioural disturbance among people with dementia in nursing homes, reported on ABC’s Lateline program last night, highlights the need for the government to address legal and human rights issues for people living with dementia.

Alzheimer’s Australia is calling on the government to undertake an urgent review of the inappropriate use of antipsychotic medications and physical restraints which reflect poor quality care. Antipsychotic medications are associated with very serious risks and side effects including stroke and death. Use of restraints impinge on people’s human and legal rights to freedom and safety.

Glenn Rees, CEO of Alzheimer’s Australia, said that the Lateline report comes as no surprise, and has welcomed the Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, Mark Butler’s commitment to building the capacity of the aged care sector to provide higher quality dementia care.

"However, more action is needed to build on the Living Longer. Living Better. aged care reforms," Mr Rees said.

"The introduction last year of a dementia care supplement was the first reflection in residential care funding of the special needs of those with the most difficult behavioural symptoms of dementia.

“But we need to ensure that this precious funding is targeted to those with complex care needs, and that it results in better trained staff and better designed facilities.

“More funding may also be needed."

Mr Rees said it was important to understand that although the majority of people with dementia experience some form of behavioural and psychological symptoms at some stage of their illness, symptoms vary greatly and only around 1 per cent of people with dementia have symptoms of violence or aggression.

He also noted that while there are particular problems in residential care facilities, 60 per cent of people with dementia live in the community.

“We know that aggressive symptoms among people with dementia are often a consequence of disorienting and distressing environments and/or poor quality care,” he said.

“We also know that well-designed facilities with adequate numbers of staff who are trained to provide personalised care to people with dementia can avoid many of these problems and keep people safe.

“There are 321,000 people with dementia in Australia today, and many of these people are or will be living in nursing homes in the future.”

According to Alzheimer’s Australia, behavioural disturbances such as agitation or aggression can often be addressed by doing simple things. For example, determining whether a person with dementia is crying out because they are in pain; or identifying if a person is hitting out at a carer.
because they are uncomfortable being showered by strangers or have an untreated urinary tract infection.

“People with dementia and their carers need to know that the Government and the Opposition are committed to ensuring residential care provide safe places for older people and that they are properly funded and regulated to deliver high quality care,” Mr Rees said.

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Media enquiries: Kayla Morgan – 0407 019 430