

Media Release

Stop rationing mental health services in aged care

1 November 2019

All Australians should be appalled by the damning findings in the Aged Care Royal Commission's initial report, which outline a shocking tale of neglect. Far reaching, systematic and urgent reform is needed to protect some of the most vulnerable people in our community – the residents of residential aged care facilities (RACFs).

Mental Health Victoria urges the Commissioners to pay special attention to the mental health of RACF residents at the December 2019 hearings which will examine the interfaces between the aged care and health systems.

As outlined in our submission to the Royal Commission, the facts are alarming:

- Men aged 85 and over have the highest suicide death rate in Australia.
- Around 15% of older Australians have symptoms of depression. This rate increases to 50% for people living in RACFs.
- Access to mental healthcare is severely rationed for RACF residents relative to the general population. Consequently, use of mental health-related medications skyrocket.
- Aged care staff lack even the most basic mental health awareness training in their qualifications.

"While stigma and stereotypes may tell us otherwise, mental ill health is not a normal part of ageing" said Mental Health Victoria CEO Angus Clelland.

"The mental healthcare needs of older Australians are often overlooked", Mr Clelland said.

"We urge the Royal Commission to investigate the barriers faced by RACF residents and their families when trying to access mental healthcare, why RACF residents have such high mental health medication rates, and the mental health capabilities of the aged care workforce".

"People living in RACFs rely on aged care staff and unpaid family and friend carers to identify the need for mental healthcare. Aged care staff are not equipped to respond to the mental health needs of residents – they lack even the most basic mental health awareness training in their qualifications. It is left to overworked nursing staff who are managing very high staff ratios to take on this responsibility".

"We need mandatory staff ratios and mandatory mental health training for all workers in RACFs", Mr Clelland said.

For further information or to arrange an interview with Angus Clelland, please call David McGuire on 0422 451 389.