



MEDIA RELEASE / STATEMENT

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Residential Aged Care Lockdown – Anti-Discrimination Commissioner calls for reports of discrimination, abuse and neglect.

The doors of residential aged care facilities are now closed to visitors due to COVID-19.

These lockdowns have been put in place to protect residents and staff. However without robust independent oversight, the very measures designed to protect them may in fact put the lives of vulnerable members of our community at risk.

It is well known that visitors play a vital role in providing essential services to residents. Services provide social engagement, assistance with meals and personal care, laundry and shopping for special items. Loss of these additional services can increase the risk of malnutrition, infection through poor personal hygiene, loss of personal property, isolation and loneliness.

When the doors were open, friends, family, volunteers and a wide array of service providers from hairdressers to clinical therapists were a valuable means of oversight to what happens in aged care facilities.

With the doors now closed crucial aspects of oversight have been lost.

Lockdowns without independent oversight rely on trust. Trust that those charged with looking after vulnerable members of our community will do so with kindness, compassion and to a high professional standard.

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety is a product of the fact that left unchecked, unscrupulous facilities will engage in management decisions or care practices which are deficient. As a result, people have prematurely died or their lives have been haunted by neglect, abuse, misery, intimidation or loneliness.

The Royal Commission has confirmed that there are pockets within the aged care industry with a grim history of breaching trust even when the doors are wide open.

Whether a facility is in lockdown or not; residents must be treated with respect and dignity and provided with a high level of care.

During this unprecedented and uncertain time it is crucial that basic human rights in the aged care sector are not diminished due to a lack of independent oversight. Unlawful and wrongful behaviours must be called out and reported.

I encourage anybody with genuine reason to believe that a resident of an aged care facility has been placed at risk of emotional or physical harm due to the current lockdown rule, to report their concerns.

Reports can be made anonymously. See our online 'Report It' forms.

People may also telephone Equal Opportunity Tasmania on (03) 6165 7515, and speak to us about suspected discrimination, abuse and neglect.

For further information or to make a report visit www.equalopportunity.tas.gov.au.

I would like to stress and acknowledge that there are some very fine aged care facilities staffed by professional, invaluable and honourable people. Their commitment to the practice of kindness and compassion should be applauded. Stories of kind and caring practices and creative initiatives that enhance the lives of residents in aged care facilities during these challenging times should be showcased.

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