

MEDIA RELEASE

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Aged Care: Getting the Safety vs Access BalanceSeniors Rights Service, Sydney Australia

The first right in the Aged Care Charter of Rights is that people have the right to “Safe and high quality care and services”.

As a response to COVID-19, numerous aged care residences (ACRs) have “locked down”, which meant residents were no longer allowed visitors. Despite the obvious distress this would cause, particularly for residents with high-stage dementia, it was considered the safest option by many ACRs. This was coupled with a reassurance from the sector that staff and health care providers would be regularly screened.

As highlighted by NSW Health Minister, Mr Brad Hazzard, an unwell aged care worker came to work for six days whilst displaying symptoms and ultimately tested positive for COVID-19.

Russell Westacott, CEO of Seniors Rights Service said: “It appears that in some circumstances staff are not being appropriately screened which is putting residents and other staff at risk. We understand visitor restrictions need to be in place but this is clearly an inadequate precaution if staff are not being screened, and given appropriate leave. There needs to be a proper balance when it comes to safety considerations especially when residents and their loved ones are being severely restricted in some ACRs across NSW.”

However, Mr Westacott recognised, in regard to social access, the sector on the whole was stepping up: “We have seen some innovative strategies being developed in aged care residences, enabling family access to residents via video links and other front-foot approaches. Seniors Rights Service commends the sector for this.

Seniors Rights Service is the leading rights-based service delivery organisation in terms of Australia’s response to the rights of seniors including services to those who experience elder abuse. Seniors Rights Service stands ready and continues to provide aged care advocacy services to aged care recipients in NSW as well as free and confidential legal services to older people across the state. Our organisation has been in communication with the aged care provider concerned – as we do in any scenario such as this – and have offered the opportunity to provide support and advice to the older residents of the ACR, their family members and their representatives.

More details regarding Seniors Rights Service can be found at: seniorsrightsservice.org.au

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