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The Director  
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 3  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St  
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Director

### **National Seniors submission to the *Inquiry into registered nurses in New South Wales nursing homes***

National Seniors is pleased to provide a submission to the *Inquiry into registered nurses in New South Wales nursing homes*. We hold concerns regarding the proposal to amend the requirement for registered nurses to be on duty at all times in NSW aged care facilities.

This requirement may be amended as a result of 2014 changes to the Commonwealth *Aged Care Act 1997* which removed the distinction between 'high care' and 'low care' in aged care facilities (*Aged Care (Living Longer Living Better) Bill 2013*).

With 200,000 individual fee-paying members, National Seniors is by far the country's largest organisation for the over-50s. For 35 years it has had a strong record in representing older Australians in a broad range of community, business and government environments.

National Seniors believes that there will be a direct impact on vulnerable and elderly aged care residents in NSW if the requirement to have registered nurses on duty at all times in aged care facilities is removed. We are specifically concerned that a decrease to the number of registered nurses will result in a respective decrease in the quality of care provided to elderly residents of aged care facilities.

Without registered nurse management, care and supervision of elderly aged care residents, it can be expected that residents will be admitted to hospital for the management and care of avoidable injuries or illnesses, for example:

- following clinical incidents such as falls,
- for pain management and wound care, for example complex dressings,
- for chemotherapy and medication management,
- for medical consultation and review,
- for palliative (end-of-life) care.

Such complex treatments can be carried out in an aged care facility by a registered nurse – a cost saving to the State. If the requirement for registered nurses to be on duty at all times in aged care facilities is removed, there will be a respective increase in admissions to State funded acute care and an increase to government health expenditure.

There will also be prolonged acute hospital stays as elderly patients are not able to be discharged back to an aged care facility if registered nurses are not available to provide skilled, clinical care and management to aged care residents with complex high care needs.

Older people and their families' experience significant disruption and trauma when transferred to acute care. Often, elderly residents have indicated that they do not wish to be transferred to acute care as part of their documented assessments on entry into an aged care facility (*Australian Aged Care Quality Standards - 3.9 Choice and decision making*).

Registered nurses are also required to manage the ordering, storage, administration, review and disposal of medications. Schedule 8 medications cannot be appropriately managed or monitored unless a registered nurse is present.

In addition, 'when required medicines' (PRN) and Nurse Initiated Medications (NIM) require the assessment of a registered nurse prior to administration.

Research by National Seniors has found that:

- Patients record greater satisfaction and better health outcomes on a number of clinical indicators when there are higher proportions of registered nurses.
- By 2020 nursing home staff numbers are projected to increase by only around 14 percent yet demand is set to jump by almost 60 percent.
- There is an urgent need for improved wages and conditions to attract skilled staff, better training and advancement opportunities, and a more positive workplace culture<sup>1</sup>.

Already we are seeing increasing frailty, dependence and multiplicity of illnesses, particularly dementia, in aged care facilities. This will continue to increase as older Australians delay relocation to an aged care facility, preferring to receive care within the home.

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<sup>1</sup> National Seniors Australia. 2010. The Future of Aged Care in Australia. Available at [http://nationalseniors.com.au/sites/default/files/Future\\_of\\_Aged\\_Care.pdf](http://nationalseniors.com.au/sites/default/files/Future_of_Aged_Care.pdf)

***National Seniors calls on the government to maintain the provision for registered nurses to be on duty at all times within NSW aged care facilities.***

Childcare centres, schools and hospitals have mandated staffing ratios and staffing qualifications at national and state/territory levels.

National Seniors believes that older Australians should be afforded the same level of care and quality of care as other cohorts in society.

National Seniors would appreciate the opportunity to elaborate on these measures before the Committee.

Yours faithfully

**Dr Irene Stein**  
**NSW Policy Advisory Group Chair**