

Nick asks questions on Fair Work Bill and Aged Care

Nick Xenophon, Independent Senator for SA

Key points:

- As part of Senate Estimates this year, Nick asked a number of questions to Ministers and Departmental representatives in relation to aged care.
- These questions and answers are published in the Senate Estimates Hansard.
- However, time is often limited and Senators have the opportunity to submit the questions that they do not have time to ask 'on notice' in writing.
- Nick has put the questions below on notice to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, and the Department of Health and Ageing.
- Nick is very concerned about the looming crisis facing aged care provision in Australia.
- These concerns include staffing ratios, adequate funding for aged care providers and improved pay and conditions for aged care nursing staff.
- He is also concerned about effect of award modernisation on the viability of aged care providers and the quality of aged care.

Questions on Notice to Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Outcome 5 - Fair Work Australia and award modernisation

Questions:

- 1.1 Is DEEWR aware of Aged & Community Services SA modelling that indicates that a typical aged care provider will gain \$1,100 per bed from the Budget but lose \$6,000 to \$8,000 per bed in award modernisation costs?
- 1.2 What is DEEWR's response to this modelling?
- 1.3 Given its central role in funding aged care, what instructions has the Federal Government provided instruction to DEEWR to plan to assist with the transition of the aged care sector to modern awards?
- 1.4 If so, have these instructions included consideration of additional funding for aged care providers to meet the costs of modern awards?

Recently, the ANF called for aged care nurses to be paid at the same level of hospital nurses (as has the aged care sector for many years). The Productivity Commission said this would cost \$400m in the first year and then \$100m every year after that, just to catch up.

- 2.1 Can DEEWR confirm the costs projected by the Productivity Commission?
- 2.2 What instructions has DEEWR been given to explore options to respond to the calls for aged care nurses to be provided with the same pay and conditions as nurses working in hospitals?

2.3 Have these instructions included the consideration of increasing funding to aged care providers to employ more nursing staff at the higher level of pay and conditions under modern awards?

2.4 If so, what have these considerations concluded?

Questions on Notice to Department of Health and Ageing

Outcome 4 - Aged Care

Questions:

1. Does DOHA agree that listing warnings of non-compliance or complaints on the web can be misleading or cause undue concern unless contextual information is provided so that people can ascertain the nature of the warning or complaint?
2. What is being planned to mitigate any risk of misleading information being placed on the web so that consumers can be fully informed?
3. More specifically:
 - a. what contextual information will be provided on the website?
 - b. will the web record how many warnings or complaints have been made?
 - c. will the web record if and when the problem was rectified?
 - d. will the aged care provider be given an online right of reply?
4. What is the DOHA's response to claims made on the Four Corners program on 1 June 2009 that the existing compliance scheme investigates processes rather than specific complaints?
5. The Auditor General Report (2 June 2009) found two aspects of the managing and allocating of places that need to be improved to assist transparency and planning:
6. The Department should provide advice to the Minister on options for incorporating numbers of Indigenous aged 50-69 population into the planning ratio target;
7. The Department should assess alternatives to how the department applies the national aged care ratio across states to better account for demographic differences.
8. What steps does DoHA plan to take in relation to these recommendations?
9. What are the current overall levels of bond funds being held by individual providers?
10. What are the levels for regional areas?
11. What were they five years ago?
12. What were they ten years ago?

A note from Nick...

Thanks for taking the time to read this extract. If you have the time, I'd appreciate it if you were willing to share your thoughts on ways to address the issues facing aged care.

You can do this either by calling me: 08 8232 1144 or by email:

Senator.Xenophon@aph.gov.au