



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Media Release

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Aged Care workers need better pay

The cause of better rewarding aged care workers was raised with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations Julia Gillard in the Parliament on Thursday during Question Time by the Independent Member for New England Tony Windsor.

Mr Windsor believes that aged care workers are dreadfully underpaid and he asked the Minister about the Government's plans to overcome the situation.

Mr Windsor's question and the Deputy Prime Minister's response are below:

Mr WINDSOR (New England) (3:03 PM) —My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister and it relates to the funding of aged-care providers and wage rates for aged-care workers. The Deputy Prime Minister would be aware that the Productivity Commission is to carry out an inquiry into aged care. While this inquiry is welcome, I ask: is the Deputy Prime Minister aware that recent increases to the cost of living of 2.9 per cent are not matched by the 1.7 per cent increase in care subsidies? Given that the smaller aged-care providers are currently financially stressed and that aged-care workers are dreadfully underpaid, does the government have any plans to overcome that situation or is it going to wait and delay action until the Productivity Commission reports?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor) (Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) —I thank the member for New England for his question and I am sure that his concerns about the circumstances of aged care in his electorate and more broadly are very genuine. I am of course aware of the issue involving the aged-care workforce, including aged-care nurses. As the member may know, the Australian Nurses Federation, very properly, has been raising this issue with members of parliament because it is concerned about the wages and conditions of people who work in aged care. It is also concerned about how these wages and conditions compare with alternative occupations for nurses and, consequently, what that means for the workforce in the aged-care sector.

I think the member would acknowledge that these are complex questions, because costs in aged care end up being borne, of course, by government but they also end up being borne by individuals. They end up being borne by government and individuals in a circumstance where, as we all know, our society is ageing, people are living longer, the circumstances in which they want to live the remainder of their lives are changing and the demand, particularly for ever-increasing quality, is high. That means that there are lots of costs and complexities that need to be worked through.

That is why we have got the Productivity Commission working on this question. Of course, we will continue to work in dialogue with the Australian Nurses Federation and others who properly raised these issues on behalf of the industry. As a government we have endeavoured to lift some of the pressures in aged care, particularly some of the pressures about the availability of capital, and you would have seen some of the measures that have been taken there in recent budgets. But I understand the member's concern is genuine, and we will be continuing to work with the aged-care industry, including in his electorate.

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