

Media Release

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OLDER AUSTRALIANS HAVE MORE TO FEAR THAN COVID-19

Elderly Queenslanders are at greater risk of abuse, neglect and exploitation due to the closed-door regulations and lockdowns necessitated by COVID-19.

Further, too many seniors are still being subjected to unlawful physical and chemical restraints in residential aged care facilities, according to Queensland Public Advocate Mary Burgess.

Ms Burgess highlighted the two issues to mark World Elder Abuse Awareness Day today (15 June).

She implored the community to be vigilant and alert to the signs of elder abuse occurring in people's homes and residential aged care facilities.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has meant that our world and our social interactions – for the elderly in particular – have become much more confined," Ms Burgess said.

"It's not just COVID-19 that our senior citizens fear. Many have experienced the isolation of not having regular visits with family and friends, and the limiting of many of the services and activities that help them to feel connected to their community.

"Sadly too, COVID-19 has provided the opportunity for greater neglect by some family members or carers.

"Older members of our community are entitled to consideration and respect. It is not acceptable for them to be financially or physically abused by family members or others close to them because of their age or physical vulnerability.

“Nor is it right or just for older people who live in residential aged care to be subjected to practices that deny their dignity and breach their fundamental human rights.”

Concerning stories about the use of physical and chemical restraint in residential aged care were told to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, and followed the Four Corners expose on the shocking treatment of some aged care residents.

The Royal Commission’s interim report released late last year revealed instances where the use of restrictive practices had been “inhumane, abusive and unjustified”. It also found that it was common for physical restraint and powerful drugs to be used to sedate aged care residents, to make them more manageable, without first obtaining permission from the person or their legal decision-makers, as is required by law.

At the urging of numerous individuals and agencies across Australia, including the Queensland Public Advocate, the Australian Government acted, introducing the *Quality of Care Amendment (Reviewing Restraints Principles) Principles* late last year.

“Unfortunately, I remain concerned that these changes fall short of providing a clear legal framework for the use of restrictive practices,” Ms Burgess said.

“I still have serious concerns about the failure of some medical practitioners and aged care providers to obtain proper consent or authorisation before using restrictive practices on aged care residents, including for the administration of medication.”

The Commonwealth Department of Health is reviewing the implementation of the new restraints principles and considering their effectiveness in minimising the use of physical and chemical restraints in residential aged care.

“I welcome this review,” Ms Burgess said.

“I am hopeful it will provide the Australian Government with additional mechanisms to deliver a stronger legislative framework, with adequate safeguards and protections around the use of restrictive practices in aged care.

“Ultimately, we want better care and quality of life for older Australians.”

ENDS

Note 1: The primary role of the Public Advocate is to promote and protect the rights, interests and participation of Queenslanders with impaired decision-making capacity in all aspects of community life.

Note 2: The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety’s Interim Report is located [here](#).

Note 3: Public Advocate Mary Burgess is available for interview. Please contact the Department of Justice and Attorney-General Media Relations Branch on 3738 9271, media.relations@justice.qld.gov.au with interview requests.