



Via email to: Janet.Anderson@agedcarequality.gov.au

5 January 2024

Dear Commissioner

RE: Consumers and Families panel

You may recall we wrote to you on 16 June 2023 regarding our disappointment with the level of engagement through the Consumers and Families panel and consumer engagement webinars to which you responded on 23 June 2023. We appreciated your prompt response.

Unfortunately, our members do not consider any changes have been made to the approach to consumer engagement by the Commission since we corresponded. At our last meeting, they asked us to write to you again. Whilst webinars are useful mechanisms to receive information, our members have not found them a productive way to provide feedback. Any questions we have posed in advance through the available mechanism have not been answered in the subsequent presentation. We have not been invited to any of the direct engagement opportunities cited in your Aged Care Quality Bulletin #60 – December 2023.

Although we are unaware of the full extent of your individual communications with consumers, the publicly facing opportunities for engagement do seem more suited to participation from those with high literacy and IT skills who can retrieve and navigate information, to the detriment of a large section of the ageing population who struggle with processing new knowledge either because of conceptual difficulties or because English is not their first language.

We have concerns regarding ongoing shortfalls in care minutes being delivered, gaps in RN 24/7 coverage in facilities not subject to an exemption and mass downgrading or removal entirely of Enrolled Nurses from the skill mix. As the aged care regulator your organisation must have both the courage and resources to enforce staffing requirements, with penalties for providers not doing the right thing. We worry that without robust enforcement the policy and legislative reforms so desperately needed, as identified through the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, will fail to impact the experience of older people.

Whilst we are pleased to see consumer engagement embedded in the Commissions' 2023/24 Corporate Plan, we believe current systems for engagement do not allow for the level of feedback required to mitigate risk within the sector. We would seek changes to the panel that enable greater two-way information flow. We believe the larger consumer representative organisations are useful to gain feedback but can lack connectedness to the real experience of end-users depending on size and composition of membership (e.g., membership largely made up from alignment with other organisations rather than individuals). QACAG Inc. although a small grass-roots organisation, retains its direct links to end-users, workers, and visitors to aged care.

We hope that in 2024 we will have more opportunity to engage directly.

Margaret Zanghi

Margaret Zanghi
President, QACAG Inc.

cc. Minister Mark Butler, Minister Anika Wells, Mr Ian Yates, Interim Inspector-General Aged Care.