

25 February 2021

To the Mercy Health community

**Re: An open letter to residents, clients, families and staff of Mercy Health residential aged care and home care services**

On Friday 26 February 2021, we are expecting the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety to release its final report. It will draw conclusions about the evidence that has been presented to the Royal Commission. It will also make recommendations about issues that need to be addressed and changes that need to be made by all Australians to reform our aged care system for the better.

**We remain committed to the reform of aged care**

Before the Government announced the Royal Commission, Mercy Health gave our unqualified public support for the inquiry. As we have said from the beginning, such a review and a commitment to reform presents a generational opportunity to improve the lives of older Australians.

While some of the content of submissions and witness testimony has been upsetting and concerning, and in some cases damning for parts of the aged care sector, it is also essential that older people and their families can be heard. The Royal Commission has been an important platform to give voice to those who may otherwise not have been heard.

When the final report is delivered, we are likely to be reminded of the worst and best of what our aged care system has been to date and what we might be able to do as a nation to make aged care better for the future.

**How Mercy Health has supported the work of the Royal Commission**

Mercy Health has supported the work of the Royal Commission at every step, throughout the gathering of evidence, through hearings, and submissions. We have responded to every call for information and comment. The Commissioners themselves visited our homes in Montrose in Victoria and in Cairns in Far North Queensland.

With our expertise in healthcare, we have also been able to reflect credibly on how to achieve a critical balance between clinical safety and quality in our residential aged care homes. This has also allowed us to use the clinical expertise we have in our hospitals and health services, especially in the delivery of high-quality geriatric medicine, rehabilitation, dementia and end-of-life care, and to determine how we apply this to the skills and experiences we have in residential aged care.

I am very proud of the issues we have raised and I am grateful for the additional work that many of our teams and partners have taken on, both in response to the Royal Commission and in the fight against coronavirus in 2020.

There is sometimes a view that the reform of Government-funded or regulated sectors like aged care is solely the responsibility of Government. This is not the case. The way we treat and care for our elderly citizens is everyone's responsibility. Mercy Health is guided to care

by our mission and by our values. This is why we have fully supported the work of the Royal Commission and the Government to seek real change.

We have never accepted that our care is generic, that we should aim for a minimum regulated standard, or that we should focus solely on the public dollar to define the standards of quality and safety inherent in our care. Since Catherine McAuley established the Sisters of Mercy, paving the way for the foundations of our ministry in health and aged care, our purpose has been to serve those in need. We have always been called to support the public good.

We also said at the outset of the Royal Commission that while we believe strongly in our own ethic and standard of care, we are not perfect. We have never been and never will be perfect. Like others, at times we will have failed those we serve. Notwithstanding, we know from years of working in both health and aged care that quality and safety are not about funding or regulation — they are a direct product of the culture of an organisation. We see our 'care first' culture as the key to delivering the best care possible in our hospitals and health services and in aged care.

### **What else are we doing to make aged care better for every Australian?**

Our cultural focus over the past six or more years has been to re-emphasise some very simple concepts in our care. In many ways we have refocused on the basics to ensure that human rights and the rights of those we serve are fundamental to the way we design or redesign our environments, our processes and the roles of people who provide care. Our Mercy Way training and approach, which is currently being rolled out in our aged care environment and beyond, underlines this effort. While we are disappointed in our progress of this roll out, which has been negatively impacted on by the coronavirus pandemic, we remain confident that this now forms the foundations of a whole different approach to aged care — one that could help the entire sector to rethink a 'care first' approach to older people and their needs as they age, at home or in care.

Concepts like our small household living approach to care, which have been of real interest to the Royal Commission and to Government, are also important innovations that are leading the way we might think about aged care into the future.

### **What happens next?**

We must take heart that the findings and recommendations of the Royal Commission will deliver some clear direction and stimulus — some permission for change. I encourage everyone to lend your support to ensure that Government feels certain about the change that needs to occur in response to the Commission's recommendations.

Last week, our aged care peak bodies launched a campaign designed to highlight the key issues that we see as important to achieving real change and reform of our system.

With the slogan, 'It's time to care about aged care', the campaign supports our call for a complete rethink of the aged care system. You may have seen some of the advertisements and themes in the media. This is a call for every Australian to take action.

### **Support our campaign**

As someone we know cares about the future of aged care in Australia, we encourage you to show your support for the 'It's time to care about aged care' campaign. You can sign the online petition on the campaign website [www.careaboutagedcare.org.au](http://www.careaboutagedcare.org.au) or sign the petition that can be found in the entrance of our Mercy Place homes.

Some of the themes that the sector called out in the campaign included the need to increase the amount of public money our nation spends on aged care. This is a direct call to Government to fund the true cost of providing aged care now and into the future. We should not accept that Australia currently spends less than half of what other similarly-sized wealthy nations provide for aged care.

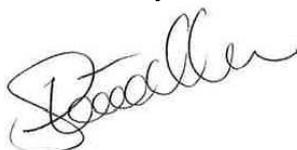
Importantly, the sector has called for a united approach and a culture of shared responsibility between governments, providers and indeed the Australian community for both the problems and the solutions.

We will continue to argue for the funding and the policy environment that assists us to provide great aged care for older Australians. I will also continue to speak openly and fairly about the changes we want to make, so that we can continue to improve the culture of care in our aged care system and the quality of the people who give that care. As Australians, we should accept no less.

We will have more to say when the final report of the Royal Commission is released and as we engage with Government to design and implement reforms. I firmly believe that a good foundation is a great start to any change and I want to invite you to share my focus on this generational change in care for older Australians.

As always, thank you for your ongoing support and for supporting this campaign. We look forward to providing you with further updates on these reforms.

Yours sincerely



**Adj Prof Stephen Cornelissen**  
Group Chief Executive Officer  
Mercy Health