



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT

Bills - Second Reading

11 May 2017

**PUBLIC HEALTH AMENDMENT
(REGISTERED NURSES IN NURSING HOMES)**

BILL 2016

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend) (12:18): Aged care in our electorate of Wallsend is an issue close to our hearts. People in Wallsend care about the wellbeing and treatment of the elderly in our community. Wallsend residents are keen to support the Public Health Amendment (Registered Nurses in Nursing Homes) Bill 2016. In 2009 an attempt was made to privatise the Wallsend Aged Care Facility and the entire community rallied against it. I thank those people in the gallery today who supported the community in the need to keep the aged-care facility in public hands. It was a big fight but we won. Under the weight of their support and intense community pressure, the Government changed its mind on the sell-off and the Wallsend Aged Care Facility remains in public hands.

Our community's reaction to the decision to scrap the rule requiring registered nurses to be present at aged-care facilities around the clock has been anger, disgust and frustration. Community members are saying, "Oh no, we have to go through all of this again on behalf of our elderly." New South Wales was once envied for its gold-standard protections for aged-care residents. It was the only State in the country to mandate the employment of on-site registered nurses, of which New South Wales can be proud. The Minister's decision removed protective legislation that had been in place for more than 25 years in New South Wales.

The only benefit of removing the 24/7 registered nurse requirement was to increase profits for nursing homes, but it came at a high price for elderly residents and their families. In 2015, eight of the top 10 locations calling for an emergency ambulance were nursing homes. Without an on-site registered nurse, elderly residents have been sent to already overcrowded emergency departments to access nursing care. We cannot afford to increase this figure by referring tasks that could be carried

out by registered nurses in aged-care facilities. The removal of registered nurses has resulted in delayed treatment and additional strain on our hospitals, which hospitals cannot absorb —and that is certainly the case at John Hunter Hospital in the Wallsend electorate.

Patients in New South Wales hospitals are facing long waiting times in emergency departments, with data from the Bureau of Health Information listing John Hunter Hospital as one of the worst performers. In October to December last year, 35 per cent of patients at John Hunter Hospital waited for more than four hours—well above the State average. Statewide, 25.7 per cent of patients waited longer than four hours in emergency departments. According to Australian Bureau of Statistics data, almost 20 per cent of Wallsend residents are aged over 65, compared with a State average of 14 per cent.

As our population ages in Wallsend and across New South Wales, it is imperative that we cement protections for elderly people, including the requirement for aged-care facilities to employ registered nurses at all times. Elderly members of the Wallsend community have contributed to New South Wales all their lives at all levels. We owe them much more than we can repay. Having registered nurses in our aged-care facilities is a matter of decency and a basic human right. At an average age of 83½, Australians entering aged-care facilities are older and frailer than ever before, many with chronic and complex care needs that require the skills of a registered nurse. Registered nurses provide higher levels of pain relief, dispense medications and undertake procedures that other aged-care workers are not permitted to do.

Registered nurses are a fundamental part of the structure that supports an efficient and fair staffing model. By removing registered nurses, that staffing structure has fractured, effectively putting an end to the requirement to have a director of nursing to oversee care, and preventing enrolled nurses from operating within their professional scope of practice. Registered nurses are vital in aged-care facilities; they oversee medications, including assessing side-effects; they undertake nursing procedures, including urinary catheters, naso-gastric tubes and wound care; they minimise unnecessary transfers to emergency departments; they provide palliative care at the nursing home; and they provide support and supervision to enrolled nurses and assistants in nursing. Residents in aged-care facilities are someone's loved one. They have contributed to our society, they all have interesting life stories and they all deserve safe, quality care. The decision to employ a registered nurse should be based solely on the care needs of residents.