



## THE HON JUSTINE ELLIOT MP

### Minister for Ageing

#### MEDIA RELEASE

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#### **Gastro Outbreak Coordinators - Australia's Nursing Homes**

Australia's nursing homes and hostels will be asked to nominate a designated outbreak coordinator in charge of the protection of residents – in the event of an outbreak.

The specially-designed gastroenteritis awareness and prevention kits are being distributed to help nursing homes to respond to possible outbreaks and minimise risks.

The Minister for Ageing, Mrs Justine Elliot gave the update at the Australian Nursing Federation 2008 Aged Care Conference.

The distribution to Australia's 2,870 nursing homes and hostels began earlier this week.

Under the \$65,000 plan, every nursing home would receive the free full kit.

Each year, there are 17 million gastroenteritis cases in Australia – the majority of them are mild. But older and frail people are more susceptible and symptoms are often more severe.

Last year, there were 1,879 outbreaks of gastroenteritis notified, affecting 37,474 people. Sixty per cent of gastroenteritis outbreaks occurred in nursing homes.

The **Gastro-Info: Gastroenteritis Kit for Aged Care** covers how to:

- Identify the signs and symptoms of a gastroenteritis outbreak;
- Nominate an Outbreak Coordinator to oversee a potential outbreak;
- Engage in infection control practices to prevent outbreaks and proper specimen collection and storage;
- Develop an Outbreak Management Plan for gastroenteritis and influenza before an outbreak occurs;
- Handle food during an outbreak and proper cleaning procedures;
- Inform residents and families in the event of an outbreak; and
- Notify relevant State or Territory health authorities.

"These are very practical and commonsense kits," Mrs Elliot said.

"Nursing homes residents are often very vulnerable and frail; that is why a gastro outbreak can be dangerous.

"This is about working together with nursing home staff and the whole aged care sector to protect vulnerable members of our society," Mrs Elliot said.

Earlier this year (July 15), the Australian Government – as part of its plan to strengthen infection control within aged care homes – pledged to develop a gastroenteritis awareness and prevention education kit to support nursing home and hostel staff.

"Australia's nursing homes and hostels and their staff provide world-class care and we can never wipe out infectious diseases, but we always look at new ways to reduce infection."

The Department of Health and Ageing gastro kits do not replace State and Territory guidelines, but served as another resource tool.

**For more information, contact Mrs Elliot's office on (02) 6277 7280**