



THE HON JUSTINE ELLIOT MP

Minister for Ageing

MEDIA RELEASE

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Elliot: Older Australians – Heatwave Response

The Australian Government has reminded older Australians and nursing home operators to prepare for the upcoming heatwave.

Minister for Ageing, Mrs Justine Elliot detailed the Australian Government's response to the recent heatwave in Victoria and South Australia – and the expected one in NSW and the ACT.

The Australian Government has:

- Issued a directive to nursing homes through the Department of Health and Ageing's Office of Aged Care Quality and Compliance's Senior Nurse Adviser, Dr Susan Hunt – to monitor the health of their 170,000 residents during the heatwaves (**Attachment: Senior Nurse Advisor – to nursing home directive- Resident comfort during heat wave**);
- Written to providers of Community Aged Care Packages (CACPs), Extended Aged Care at Home (EACH) and Extended Aged Care at Home Dementia (EACHD) for frail, older people who remain in their homes in the community;
- Directed the Department of Health and Ageing to begin an audit of all 3,000 nursing homes in relation to heating and cooling, including air conditioning;
- Conducted unannounced visits by the Department of Health and Ageing on Victorian and South Australian nursing homes that were the subject of complaints about the heat;
- Worked in close liaison with the respective State Emergency Centres and has been briefed on State Emergency Services preparedness for emergencies at may raise;
- Advised anyone with concerns about family and friends in aged care homes should contact the Department of Health and Ageing's Complaints Investigation Scheme – **1800 550 552**; and
- Urged members of the community to check on the welfare of older neighbours and family members.

"This is about protecting our nation's frail and aged," the Minister for Ageing, Mrs Justine Elliot said.

"Aged care providers have a legal obligation to ensure that they are providing proper care for residents.

"Aged care staff are dedicated and committed to the care of older Australians, but it is important in heatwave conditions that they recognise residents may not be able to communicate their discomfort. They must continue to be vigilant in assessing the needs of those in their care," Mrs Elliot said.

The Health department's advice says due to aged-related changes, older people do not always recognise that they are overheating and do not sweat as much as younger people.

They are also more prone to heat stress because their body may not adjust as efficiently as younger people's bodies to sudden temperature changes.

They are more likely to have a chronic medical condition and to be taking medication that may interfere with the body's ability to regulate fluid.

Under the Aged Care Act, nursing home operators must adhere to Accreditation Standards – including Outcome 2 (Health and Personal Care) and Outcome 4 (Physical Environment and Safe System).

A nursing home should monitor fluid intake to identify any person at risk of dehydration. Other advice includes:

- Ensuring that the temperature in residents' rooms and the facility is comfortable;
- Using portable air conditioners, coolers and fans if the building is not air-conditioned;
- Offering fluids frequently - fluids should be provided every hour (clinical assessment will determine the needs of those residents on fluid restricted diets). Small amounts of fluid regularly are generally more acceptable than large amounts of fluids offered less frequently;
- Considering alternative forms of fluid such as jelly, ice cream or fruit ice blocks;
- Monitoring fluid intake and output carefully, so that clinical staff are immediately aware of possible dehydration;
- Ensuring that residents' clothing is loose fitting;
- Offer tepid showers or sponging; and
- Keeping curtains and blinds closed to reduce some of the impact of the excess heat.

Details: please contact the Minister's office on 02 6277 7280.