



Senator the Hon Santo Santoro Minister for Ageing

MEDIA RELEASE

21 February 2006

15/06

Government to convene summit on elder abuse

The Federal Minister for Ageing, Senator Santo Santoro, said today he would convene a meeting of the Aged Care Advisory Committee (ACAC) to discuss the best ways of further reducing the infrequent incidence of elder abuse within Australian Government funded aged care homes.

The ACAC consists of major stakeholders in the sector, including

- provider groups such as Catholic Health Australia, Aged and Community Services Australia, Aged Care Association Australia, Baptist Community Services and Wesley Mission;
- employee representatives such as the Australian Nurses' Federation;
- advocacy groups such as Alzheimers Australia, Carers Australia, COTA National Seniors;
- professional bodies such as the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, the Australian Society for Geriatric Medicine, and the Australian Medical Association;
- as well as the Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency and other stakeholders.

“It is also my intention to consult extensively with state and territory ministers who have relevant responsibilities on the role of mandatory reporting of alleged abuse,” Senator Santoro said.

“While calls for mandatory reporting of alleged abuse by carers of the elderly has previously been rejected, I am willing to discuss this proposal and any other measures that may improve the safety of older people, especially those in residential care,” Senator Santoro said.

Senator Santoro said he had received calls today from very concerned people with relatives and friends in nursing homes, following media reports of alleged sexual abuse of some residents in a Melbourne aged care home.

“This is a truly shocking story that should not have happened, but I do not believe it is typical of the care the vast majority of older people are receiving from very dedicated staff and providers of residential aged care throughout Australia.

“In fact, of the 6000 contacts with the Complaints Resolution Scheme last year, only around one per cent were related to abuse of any kind, and only a fraction were about alleged sexual abuse. In all cases where a criminal matter such as abuse is raised with the scheme, the scheme ensures that the appropriate authorities, usually the police, are urgently informed.”

Senator Santoro said the Government has systems and processes in place to ensure it is informed of and acts promptly on all complaints relating to residential aged care.

In the case of the alleged sexual abuse at a nursing home in Melbourne, an anonymous complaint was made to the Department of Health and Ageing and immediate action was taken to notify the provider and the police.

“I encourage any carer or resident or member of the public who has information about abuse of residents to contact the Complaints Resolution Scheme immediately on 1800 550 552 FREECALL, so that these issues can be properly investigated,” Senator Santoro said.

“The scheme accepts anonymous information, so no-one should have any fear about providing information. We already have processes in place to ensure residents are treated with dignity and respect and able to live without concerns of abuse or neglect.”

He also extends this call to media organisations.

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