

QUEENSLAND NURSES UNION

Secretary: Gay Hawksworth

Assistant secretary: Beth Mohle

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PRESS RELEASE

**Attention: Health, aged care and workplace reporters
Regional Queensland media outlets**

6 December 2009

**Queensland nurses take their aged care message
to marginal Labor seats tomorrow
*Make the 2010 Federal Budget, the Aged Care Budget
– or face the social and political consequences***

Queensland nurses will tomorrow (7 December) start handing over more than 10,000 postcards, calling on the Federal Government to make aged care the centrepiece of its 2010 budget, to federal Labor politicians in marginal seats.

The postcards were collected from concerned Queenslanders over the last four months, as part of the nurses' campaign for improved staffing levels in the aged care sector – the national *Because We Care: Quality care for older Australians* campaign.

The first postcard hand overs – to the Member for Bonner, Kerry Rae, and the Member for Moreton, Graham Perrett - come as State and federal leaders meet in Canberra to discuss national reform of the health and aged care systems. Hand overs will occur in other Queensland electorates over the next two weeks.

Queensland Nurses Union (QNU) assistant secretary, Beth Mohle, said the nurses are handing the postcards over in individual electorates, rather than in one bundle, so as many members of parliament as possible get the message about the need for urgent and effective action on aged care.

“It is a reminder to federal Labor members that providing quality aged care is one of the biggest challenges facing Australia and that next year's federal budget needs to start addressing the issues of staffing and funding if we are to meet the challenge.

“The 2010 federal budget has to be the *Aged Care Budget*. It is as simple as that. Failure to make this happen could see nurses campaigning on the issue during the next federal election campaign. Nurses, through the *Your Rights at Work* campaign during the last federal election, have shown they are strong and effective campaigners if they decide something is worth campaigning for.

“I can assure the Federal Government and all local politicians that nurses, in all sectors, believe this is an issue worth campaigning over. Ten thousand postcards in such a short timeframe is an excellent effort and shows the extent of feeling in the community about this issue.

“If we had more time we could have collected more than 100,000, but this sends a good quick message that next year’s budget needs to focus heavily on providing quality aged care for all Australians in the years ahead. For that to happen the staffing problems in the sector need to be addressed and be addressed now.

“These problems have been recognised and written about for many years, in report after report, but little effective action has been taken to fix them. We cannot afford any more delay.

“The latest report, *Nurses in Residential Aged Care* done by Access Economics this year and released last week, again highlights the extent of the challenge we face in aged care.

“Access Economics estimates that between 2010 and 2020 the number of people in residential aged care (RAC) will grow from 174,000 to 251,000 and the number aged over 85 will explode from about 85,000 to over 140,000. Over the same period the average age of the nursing workforce will continue to rise unless something is done.

“Problems in aged care are also impacting significantly on the wider health system with large numbers of acute hospital beds being occupied by people who should be in residential aged care. The current number in Queensland is nearly 400 beds per day.

“Staffing problems in aged care, especially the cuts to registered nurse (RN) numbers and hours in recent years, are also putting more pressure on the acute healthcare sector as more nursing home residents are readmitted to hospital.

“As Access Economics points out in *Nurses in Residential Aged Care*:

Nursing research has demonstrated links between nurse staffing and the quality of RAC. Horn

et al (2005) found that care delivered by RNs in RAC settings was strongly related to better resident outcomes, including:

- fewer pressure ulcers;
- fewer hospitalisations;
- lower incidence of urinary tract infections;
- less weight loss; and
- a lower risk of deterioration in resident’s ability to perform daily living activities.

“To ensure these staffing issues are addressed in time to meet the future challenges of an ageing population, the 2010 federal budget must include initiatives that address the inadequate pay and nursing skill mix problems that plague the industry,” Ms Mohle said.

The *Because We Care* campaign, which was launched in March this year, has so far also involved television and newspaper advertising and workplace visits aimed at organising aged care nurses into effective community campaigners.

Campaign objectives include:

- seeking mechanisms that ensure openness and accountability in the way taxpayer funds are spent;

- fair pay for nurses and care staff in aged care who are now paid up to \$300 a week less than nurses in other sectors;
- introducing the right balance of skills and working hours so that nurses and care staff can provide quality care; and
- recognition of the professional skills of assistants in nursing and care staff through a national licensing system.

End

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***Because We Care* campaign**

This week's Queensland postcard delivery program

Monday, 7 December 2009

Time: 9.00am

Electorate: Bonner

MP: Kerry Rae

Location: QNU office, 187 Melbourne St West End (Level 2)

Monday, 7 December 2009

Time: 11.00am

Electorate: Moreton

MP: Graham Perrett

Location: Suite 106, Sunnybank Times Square, 250 McCullough St

Tuesday, 8 December 2009

Time: 2.45pm –3.00pm

Electorate: Petrie

MP: Yvette D'arth

Location: Shop 8, Aspley Planet Centre, 46 Gayford St

Please note
The week two program
will be released next week.