

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 24 July 2017**

**One in two aged care residents may be living in pain—where is their treatment?**

Inappropriate practices in aged care facilities are leaving as many as one in two residents under-treated for chronic pain—impacting some of the most vulnerable members of our society. Leaving aged care residents to suffer untreated chronic pain is not an acceptable option.

It is estimated up to 80% of aged care residents have chronic pain<sup>1,2</sup> however more than half of residents (52%) in aged care facilities in Australia have a diagnosis of dementia while two in three (67%) require high-level care to manage behaviour.<sup>3</sup>

This suggests a great deal of pain goes unacknowledged or treated in aged care facilities due to dementia and cognitive impairment reducing the capacity for appropriate detection.

In people with cognitive impairment who are non-verbal, untreated chronic pain can result in behavioural and psychological disturbances (BPSD) and lead to inappropriate use of chemical and physical restraints.

Yet almost half—41%—of care professionals have received no training on assessment of pain in people with dementia. 90% of care professionals say that additional training would be beneficial.<sup>4</sup>

Although chronic pain is difficult to treat and may be lifelong, evidence shows that multidisciplinary pain management is the most effective approach for minimising the impact of pain, improving function and quality of life—whether or not the patient has a cognitive impairment and regardless of age.

The government's Aged Care Funding Instrument does not provide adequate funding for pain assessments and support of appropriate person-centred care plans.

Painaustralia CEO Carol Bennett says reform is urgently needed to give dignity to our frail and aged.

“Our residential aged care facilities are falling short of managing chronic pain and current federal funding provision does not support evidence-based best-practice care,” said Ms Bennett.

“Untreated pain not only impacts the individual resident, there is also greater distress to their families and a greater burden of care for staff.

“We need aged care staff that are appropriately trained in pain assessment and management. We need reporting practices that include pain and we need appropriate multidisciplinary care. This means we have to reform the current government funding provisions to ensure people with pain can get appropriate care. Anything less is denying appropriate care to our older generation.”

With an ageing population—the Australian Bureau of Statistics projects that by 2064 there will be 9.6 million people aged 65 and over, and 1.9 million aged 85 and over, constituting 23% and 5% of Australia's projected population respectively—pain management in residential aged care is an issue that is in the interest of every Australian.

*This media release is released during National Pain Week 2017, which runs 24-30 July.*

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**More information:**

For more information about this issue please refer to our Painaustralia [Submission to the Review of National Aged Care Quality Regulatory Processes July 2017](#).

**References:**

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- <sup>1</sup> Gibson SJ, *Improvement of Pain Management in Residential Aged Care*, Issues Paper
  - <sup>2</sup> Zwakhalen S, Pain in elderly people with severe dementia: A systematic review of behavioural pain assessment tools, *BMC Geriatrics* 2006;6:3
  - <sup>3</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, [Residential aged care and Home Care 2013-14](#) web report 2015
  - <sup>4</sup> Alzheimer's Australia, [End of life care for people with dementia: Survey report](#), 2014