



Royal Commission
into Aged Care Quality and Safety

Statement of Beryl Emily Hawkins

Name: Beryl Emily Hawkins
Date of birth: [REDACTED] 1928
Address: [REDACTED] NARRAWEENA NSW 2099
Date:

1. This statement made by me accurately sets out the evidence that I am prepared to give to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. This statement is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.
2. Where direct speech is referred to in this statement, it is provided in words or words to the effect of those, which to the best of my recollection, were used at the time.
3. The views I express in this statement are my own based on my experience.

Background

4. My name is Beryl Emily Hawkins and I live in Narraweena, NSW. I am currently 91 years old, and I live at home on my own. My husband, whose nickname was Nobby, and my son Ken have both passed away. I have some family but they are all very busy. I am totally on my own. My grandchildren love me, but they are very busy with their jobs and young children. I know they care, but they don't have time to care, as is the same with many families.
5. I have lived in Australia for 46 years. My son came out here from the United Kingdom to live with his wife. He was taken ill in 1968 when he was 25 so he asked my family to come to Australia to be with him and help take care of his children. Nobby, Mum and I came to Australia from the United Kingdom in 1973, and we were with my son when he died. He was only 31 years old, with two little daughters and a son. After that, the three of us lived with my daughter-in-law for four or five years, helping her take care of the children.
6. I now live in a housing commission unit, where I've lived for 13 years. I'm in a group of 16 units and mine is a lovely unit set up for elderly people. Before I lived here, I was in a housing commission area with drug addicts and drunks. Everyone needs somewhere to live, even if they are drug addicts, but it could be frightening. I'm really happy to live here in my new unit.
7. When I moved in, I got on really well with all of the other residents, but now ten of them have died. Unfortunately, the new residents can't speak English as they are Chinese,

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Russian and Serbian, so I can't speak to them. I think that they're too old to learn English now. It makes living here lonely. I'm finding it hard.

Home care

8. Around five years ago, I qualified for a level two home care package and began receiving two hours of care twice a week. I look after my unit myself, so the carers would take me shopping or out for a coffee. Almost two years ago, I was reassessed and approved for a level three package. However, I was advised by the assessor that I would have to wait another year at least before I could receive the additional services. Later I had another assessment, and that assessor told me I would need to wait at least another year before I got my package. That was on top of the year I had already waited. Fortunately, in January 2020, I began receiving my level three package, so I now get ten hours of care a week.
9. When I was on a level two package, I paid for a third day of care each week out of my pension so that I could have the assistance I needed for my daily activities of living. I also had to pay for physiotherapy and podiatry myself. Luckily I can now get these services using my level three package. I have found the home care staff who help me to be very, very good. I've had the same carer for five years, and I very much like the people that help to look after me. We get on so well together and have so much in common. I think the carers are extremely underpaid for what they do.
10. I am concerned about those of us who are still on the waiting list for home care services that are struggling and experiencing unacceptable wait times for assistance. My 96 year old neighbour would tell me about her lengthy wait for her package. Her daughter later told me that she only had her package for a week before she passed away.
11. I now receive care on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. On long weekends, I miss out on care on Mondays and will not see anyone again until Wednesday. I also miss out on care during holiday times. Last Easter, I had to pay an additional \$400 out of my pension because the staff are paid double time on Good Friday and Easter Monday. I find missing out on care socially isolating and causes my depression.

Mental health

12. I can't go on buses anymore because I have weak legs. I can't go out by myself and I can only go out when someone takes me. Sometimes if a carer takes me, I can go out for two hours, but two hours out of 24 isn't very much. It's very frustrating. My body is still willing and I can still look after myself, but I am terrified of my future, of what's going to happen to me. I don't want to go into a nursing home. I see what's happening in the nursing homes - the cruelty - and it's terrifying.
13. I absolutely dread my future because I'm frightened that I won't be able to get around. I don't want to have to have someone change my pants. I don't want to be here for that. I haven't got any assets, so I can't pay \$600,000 - \$700,000 for a bed in a nursing home.
14. I think my depression started twelve years ago when I was living alone in a housing commission unit with drug addicts and alcoholics. I was diagnosed with depression

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around five years ago and took medication for it for about a year. I'm very lucky because I have a very good doctor who realised years ago that I don't have anyone to talk to about my life. She has given me a lovely psychologist who comes in to see me once a month. My generation doesn't go to psychologists. We didn't have them during the war and we just got on with things, so it's sort of alien to me. However, it's been really good to be able to talk to my psychologist. I don't have to pay for the sessions because they're publically funded, and I get 11 sessions a year. I feel a lot better now since getting my package, like things are coming right for me. It seems to me that if someone needs something physically, those needs are considered to be more important than mental needs. However, I don't understand the difference between mental care and physical care. When you get mentally sick, it's an illness.

15. Often I sit at home thinking about my life. It does make me feel depressed, but I'm told I'm doing well. I can manage my walker around my unit so I am able to get out of the house a little.

Issues with my teeth

16. I don't get to see the dentist often, because it's very expensive. It's been quite a few years since I've seen the dentist for a check-up – I only go when problems arise. Last year, I had to get some teeth removed at the public dental hospital, so I knew I needed dentures. I needed a set of bottom dentures, and two teeth in the top. In mid-2019 when I asked the dentist at the public dental hospital about getting some dentures, they told me that there was a two year waiting list for getting dentures made at that hospital. Instead, the hospital gave me a \$1000 voucher to put towards the cost of a new set of teeth made elsewhere. I understood that I was given the voucher because I am a pensioner. I was also told that the voucher would only be valid for one of the four public providers in the area, so I couldn't go to the private dentist I liked and saw before I got my teeth out. I went to one of the specified providers and had a new set of bottom teeth made for me. It cost me \$3500. I live off of the pension so I had to use my funeral money to pay for most of the cost of the dentures. When my husband died, I put aside \$8000 and that's my funeral money, but I keep having to spend it. I also had to spend \$2000 on a new electric bed because I can't pull myself out of bed or get my walker around.
17. The other problem with my new teeth was that they made it very painful to for me to eat. I wasn't able to eat a decent meal for a year because I couldn't chew with them. I didn't want to complain about the person who made the dentures, but when I went to back to my old dentist, she couldn't believe how much I paid for my set.
18. I couldn't afford to have another set made, so I tried to get used to them, but I couldn't. Finally, I paid my old dentist to fix my bottom dentures and now I'm really happy with them. However, I had to pay an extra \$1000 to do this, which upsets me. That was my security money which I had put aside after my husband died. Those things could be taken care of by a package. If I was getting a level three package at that time, I could have bought things that were essential to my health like new dentures. I couldn't wait the two years for dentures, so I had to pay for it myself. The whole experience made me very unhappy. I had to spend a lot of money, and I couldn't eat properly.

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Social connections

19. Every month in my community there is a 'Cheers Club'. It's an organisation run by the local council that arranges for around 100 elderly people go to a restaurant once a month. It's been going for about ten years. I couldn't go last year because I couldn't eat the food due to my painful dentures. There was one occasion where I went out to dinner with the Cheers Club, and because of my dentures, I wasn't able to eat the food. I paid for and sat through the whole dinner without eating.
20. My painful, expensive dentures stopped me socialising. However, now I've decided that I'm going to go anyway this year so that I can meet people. It costs about \$50 each time. There's also a service called Easy Link which does an outing once a month which comes to about \$50. These outings are expensive, so I can't afford to do them all of the time. For me, there are financial and physical barriers to going out and socialising.
21. I've got a new neighbour who has just moved in, a gentleman who has been inviting me out to spend time with people my age. What I love most of all is when someone walks into my unit and says 'would you like a cup of tea?'
22. Apart from the carers that come because of my level three home care package, I don't have any other support. All my friends and family have died or are too busy to visit. I've also found that no one goes and checks on their neighbours when it's hot anymore. I don't have many visitors, really – I used to, but my life has changed completely.
23. I think that there is a whole generation of people who are 80, 90 and 100 years old, sitting with their eyes closed, waiting to die. In my experience, people talk around me or to my carers as though I can't understand them. It makes me feel alone. I know that these people don't understand that they're doing it, but I'm getting my carers to learn so that it doesn't continue to happen. Despite this, I know that I'm lucky. I'm lucky that I have three lovely carers but I know other people that don't. I think of other elderly people who don't have carers and who don't know how to get home care – there's a lot of people who don't understand what to do to help themselves.

Volunteers and community support

24. I've been thinking about things that have helped me, that could help other people too. I think that if you could get volunteers that would come to you with a dog or a child and take you down to the park for half an hour, that sort of thing could help. If you didn't have a relative to take you down to the library or come in to read to you, you'd hope there were volunteers to do it.
25. I have spent 25 years doing volunteer work. When I was caring for my Mum in 1974, I got some voluntary work at a children's hospital with children that were handicapped. I went there every day for five years. Then my Mum went into a nursing home close by and I was able to take the kids I volunteered with to the nursing home to visit. The kids would shake everyone's hand, and the elderly people loved it. I really felt like I belonged in Australia then.

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26. I interviewed people for ten years doing voluntary work and I really loved that, meeting different kinds of people. I also did drug and alcohol training and worked at a hospital on the North Shore where people were going through their withdrawals. I did it to get through my grief when my husband died. I used to volunteer at Compassionate Friends, a support service for people who have lost a child, for three days and nights a week, and was on night call.
27. In 1997 I got flown out of NSW to receive an award for my volunteering. My supervisor put me up for the award. After volunteering for so long, sometimes I think 'where are the people that can help me?' I've also looked after people in my unit block and helped them when they were dying – where are the people that are helping me now?

Final remarks

28. I think I still have PTSD from the day my son died - I can see my son in my arms and myself giving him CPR. I think that even if I told my carers about this, they couldn't do anything about it. I just have to live with it. People suffer all these things. No one can do anything about my life.
29. Despite this, I can still find joy each day. I count my blessings and enjoy things like the pretty flowers I grow in my pots. I'm doing hydrotherapy now, too. There are times when I am happy. But because I have such a lot of time on my own, I can get carried away with my thoughts. I dread the future.
30. Elderly people are dying of mental health problems because they are frightened. I feel strongly about it. A lot of people who live in my block of units have no family. They're old people now. Hopefully younger people will get more care than this when they're old. Telling my story to the Royal Commission has given me a reason to live. Before, I was thinking 'what was the point of me being here?'

Signed: _____

Beryl Hawkins

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