



New push for aged care 'table'

BRIGID O'CONNELL

AGED-CARE advocates are pushing for the Federal Government to establish a My School-type league table to compare nursing homes and improve the shortage of information in the aged-care sector.

Families can search the Government's Aged Care Australia website, a directory of aged-care homes, but elder rights advocates say valuable information including staff-to-resident ratios, the mix of staff qualifications and the outcome of substantiated complaints against homes are not made available.

And they say even information like sample menus, the prevalence of bedsores and whether bedrooms have air-conditioning is not freely accessible.

Aged-care providers and the federal Department of Health and Ageing say the online directory provides everything prospective residents need and want.

Lynda Saltarelli, from the Aged Care Crisis Team – an online watchdog advocacy group – said a “My Nursing Home” website would centralise vital information and promote transparency just as the My School site was billed to achieve.

“There is no transparency, no holistic snapshot of different nursing homes,” Ms Saltarelli said.

“We don't know how the government

subsidy is spent, the extra fees and charges, or how many substantiated complaints and breaches have been made and how they've been addressed at any particular facility. One site audit report is published every three years from the Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency, and the vast majority of accreditation visits are three-yearly, at the request of the nursing home, at a convenient time, after months spent preparing.

“Community members must know what the aged-care providers are capable of when no one is watching.

“And each new report replaces the last, so there's no history.”

The Aged Care Australia website is linked to compliance reports, showing if homes have fulfilled the 44 accreditation standards. The Government's Aged Care Complaints Investigation Scheme investigates complaints, but does not reveal the number it substantiates or the outcome.

Ms Saltarelli said it was a basic right for prospective residents to know about complaints and how the home rectified problems.

The Department of Health and Ageing would not comment on whether the Government would consider increasing the amount of information made public about nursing homes, saying the website already “improved transparency, accountability and information”.