



Nursing homes back the states

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 HEALTH EDITOR

AGED care providers are backing a state push for more federal funding for aged care as a price for supporting Kevin Rudd's health reform plan, saying such a move could empty thousands of patients from clogged public hospitals.

Queensland Health Minister Paul Lucas has demanded better funding of aged care as a price for his government's acquiescence in the reform plan, which would see 30 per cent of GST funding clawed back from the states to pay local hospital networks directly.

The federal government has reserved aged care as one of a clutch of key health issues on which it will reveal more specific plans as the next election nears — sparking criticism from some states and experts who say that makes it all but impossible to evaluate the proposal.

Catholic Health Australia chief

executive Martin Lavery said there were thought to be 3000 people in hospital beds nationwide who ought to be in an aged care places, but could not be discharged because no suitable beds were available.

States did not usually publish figures to quantify this problem but last November Queensland Premier Anna Bligh revealed that every night the state's hospitals had about 336 nursing home patients taking up acute care beds.

Mr Lavery said aged care organisations had stopped building new facilities because a funding formula introduced by the Howard government paid an average of just \$26 per resident a day to cover the capital costs of providing the bricks and mortar. This compared with a report by Access Economics, which put the true cost of providing the accommodation at \$41 per day per resident, not including the costs of care.

"It would be a great shame if the delay . . . slowed down the broader

health reform agenda. Health reform is too important to be delayed," Mr Lavery said.

Greg Mundy, chief executive of Aged & Community Services Australia, which represents over 1100 organisations providing accommodation and care services to over 700,000 older people, said that last year that no state had taken up the full quota of licences issued by the federal government.

"That's a problem," Mr Mundy said. "Aged care is a long-term business. If you don't start building the homes you will need in two years' time now, they won't be ready."

Anne Fox, acting group chief executive of the West Australian-based Mercy Care, said her organisation had a two-year waiting list of people hoping for a place and next of kin were regularly on the phone "pleading" for a place.

"It's terribly fraught because you can't make places happen overnight," Mrs Fox said.



Anne Fox at the Catherine McAuley Residential Care Facility in Wembley, Perth, yesterday

COLIN MURTY