

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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## **4 Corners report into Newmarch House demonstrates lessons from which all aged care providers and governments must learn**

The Council on the Ageing (COTA) Australia, the peak body for older Australians, has welcomed the ABC and 4 Corners providing a strong voice for families in its report last night into the COVID-19 outbreak at the Anglicare Newmarch House aged care facility in Sydney, where 19 residents died from the virus.

COTA Australia Chief Executive, Ian Yates, said family voices must continue to be heard during the three separate investigations into the COVID-19 outbreak at Newmarch House as they probe a range of matters including whether appropriate management, staffing, infection control, and communication with residents and their families, was in place during this incident.

“The NSW Coroner, the Commonwealth and the Aged Care Royal Commission will each soon inquire into the COVID-19 outbreak at Newmarch House and we will await the results of those inquiries to understand properly the clinical circumstances that resulted in the worst outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the related clinical practices and care of these residents,” Mr Yates said.

“These inquiries should include detailed investigation of the clinical care provided to residents who tested positive to the disease, whether infection control measures and other clinical treatment provided at the facility were effective, and whether more residents should have been transferred to hospital.

Mr Yates said that it is clear from the 4 Corners program that communication and engagement between Newmarch, residents and families was severely wanting over a major period of time – which unnecessarily exacerbated stress for everyone during an already frightening time and robbed residents of family support at their most vulnerable point of time.

Mr Yates said the 4 Corners report also reinforces the need for the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (ACQSC) to be given additional powers to take early preventative action, beyond the existing laws that mean they can only step in after major problems have been demonstrated.

“The Government is already considering whether the ACQSC has the necessary regulatory powers. We would welcome the ACQSC having a wider range of powers to step in sooner, rather than later, and with a much broader range of tools in its regulatory tool kit.

Mr Yates said “Tonight’s report that some residents received improved clinical outcomes after they were transferred to hospital is troubling. I cannot state strongly enough how important it is that the inquiries focus on whether there was an early reluctance by the facility, or by NSW Health, to transfer residents to hospital.

“As a matter of basic human and legal rights COTA believes that every resident of every aged care home has the right to transfer to hospital if they need it and that is their preference.

“Families of residents shouldn’t be forced to go to the media to get the hospital care the resident needs, as appeared to have happened in one case at Newmarch House. Older Australians have identical rights to access the same quality of healthcare as every other Australian. Unfortunately, it seems that in some cases, the highest quality healthcare through “hospital in the home” hasn’t occurred.”

“Nobody doubts that Anglicare and all aged care providers have been forced to deal with extremely difficult situations – in a period that no one has experienced before,” he said.

“Managing a complex situation like COVID-19 is never easy, including by the most experienced medical professionals; which is why it’s so important that clear lessons be learnt out of these inquiries - not only to provide answers to the families of the residents who lost their lives but to provide valuable lessons that can be used to improve practice in the future.”

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