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COALITION MUST GUARANTEE WAGES FOR AGED CARE NURSING STAFF

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) has questioned the Coalition's commitment to historic wage reforms for low-paid nurses and care workers in the aged care sector.

During the third election debate, Coalition Leader Tony Abbott said improved wages for aged care workers should not be achieved through enterprise bargaining and that \$1.2 billion for wages as part of the Living Longer Living Better package should be put in the "general pool" of aged care funding.

ANMF (SA Branch) CEO/Secretary, Elizabeth Dabars, said today that 'The ANMF and its growing membership were angry and disappointed that nurses and care workers in aged care would miss out on better wages and conditions if the Coalition wins the election.'

'These hard-fought wage increases were part of the Workforce Compact and was the first time ever that Government funding has flowed directly into the pay packets of nurses and care workers.' Associate Professor Dabars said today.

'While the ANMF supports more funding for the aged care sector improved accountability and transparency is critical.'

Since 2002 there have been a range of funding initiatives by successive national governments directed at enhancing the capacity of aged care employers to offer competitive wages. These initiatives included \$211 million over four years in the 2002-03 Budget and a further \$877.8 million over years from 2004.

'Unfortunately, these increases to funding were not tied to bargaining or to wage levels and consequently hardly any nurses or personal care assistants saw any benefit.'

'If the Coalition is serious about raising the wages of aged care workers they would ensure that any additional funds are acquitted appropriately.'

'Tying funding to a requirement that an employer has an industrial agreement with their workforce is the most simple and transparent way to ensure that the money reaches nurses and other aged care workers.'

'Mr Abbott needs to understand that placing the \$1.2 billion allocated for improvements to wages into the general funding pool will result in taking the money away from nurses and other care staff. If that's the Coalition's position they should make this clear to nurses and aged care workers, nursing home residents and their families.'

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