



**AASW**

**Australian Association  
of Social Workers**

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16 August 2017

The Hon. Greg Hunt MP  
Minister for Health  
Minister for Sport  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister Hunt,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) to bring to your attention to an urgent issue relevant to the health and wellbeing of older Australians.

The AASW is the professional self-regulatory and credentialing body for social workers in Australia with over 10,000 members, setting the educational, ethical and practice standards for the profession. Social workers are present throughout the health care continuum providing key mental health supports to individuals, families and communities. Social workers have a long and proud tradition of working with older Australians towards supporting positive and healthy ageing, addressing issues of social injustice and advocating for system reforms. This is based on the strong commitment that every person has the right to wellbeing, self-fulfilment and self-determination.

Currently there are over 170,000 older Australians living in residential aged care who are ineligible to access much needed mental health services, including Accredited Mental Health Social Workers, through the Better Access to Mental Health Care program. While research from Australian Institute of Health and Welfare indicates a high incidence of depression (over 50%) for residents, along with reports of anxiety, they are being denied the necessary supports.

As with the recent inclusion of telehealth Medicare items for rural and remote communities, we strongly urge the government overturns the current policy that denies older Australians in residential care access to the treatment that they need.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters further, please do not hesitate to contact us directly.

Yours sincerely

Cindy Smith  
Chief Executive Officer