

Dear Senator Thorpe

Thank you so much for all you do for our people, it doesn't go unnoticed and it's so very deeply appreciated. My name is Mel Armstrong, I'm a Gomeroi woman living in [REDACTED] NSW, I'm responding to the Inquiry into racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

My grandmother, also a Gomeroi woman, passed away 15 months ago after a lengthy time with dementia, I was her carer during those 9 years and for most of my life prior to that, being raised with her and my grandfather for most of my life. Nan wasn't stolen; they did however have to flee their country and run when her mother became ill when she was very young so they could stay together.

Nan had to move to a care facility for the last 2 years of her life due to her decline and me no longer being able to keep her safe at home. Unfortunately, what came from that was dreadful neglect and harm in many ways. Nan could no longer keep the secrets of her past because of the dementia, and as you know, the past becomes the present with that diagnosis. Nan and I were a great team, I was her safe place, sadly with the care facility I couldn't keep her safe. The discrimination, manipulation, heavy control style behaviour and the blatant refusal to provide her with culturally safe care was extremely harmful.

I contacted the Aged Care Quality & Safety Commission {ACQSC} 2 years ago while Nan was still in care to raise significant concerns about her care and safety, they did very little and dismissed our case although I begged them not to. I appealed this and requested a review of their {ACQSC} policies regarding complaint handling, the results came back and their internal review found that they mishandled our complaint, did not listen to us and should not have closed it. We then opened another complaint as more incidents had occurred, that complaint combined with the previous one spanned 2 years. I have met with the Commissioner Liz Hefren-Webb on 2 occasions, the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting in January this year. I questioned the ACQSC as to why after proven neglect to a 92 year old woman they were refusing to report this to police, the HCCC and other governing bodies as it states they are meant to. When I questioned the Commissioner as to why they would not report it, she replied "it was just one person, not a systemic issue". I reminded her that if this was just one person therefore this is discrimination, which they refused to reply to.

My Nan suffered greatly at the hands of this aged care provider as did I and my children, we were abused, bullied, threatened and had to watch her be treated badly. I have reports, emails, photographs and videos of what occurred, including the 60-page report from the ACQSC of the findings to demonstrate what happened to us if required. Nan was 92 years old, frail, vulnerable, unwell, scared and living in an institutional type setting, she was not violent, she was not abusive, she did not harm other residents or staff in any way. Her rights and mine were dreadfully breached. We had 3 ministerials

from the Prime Minister during our case because I couldn't get justice, and we're still fighting for this. She didn't have to die scared at the hands of a group of qualified people who chose to perpetrate this.

Here's the list of what occurred for her during her care;

- Chemical restraint without consent and without an individual BPSD and care plans
- Failure to understand and demonstrate their obligations in Restrictive Practice
- Administering a chemical restraint without consent
- Environmental restraint without consent - refusal for NOK to speak to any staff because a complaint was made to the commission after they were caught administering a chemical restraint without consent, Nan did not have capacity herself.
- Failure to provide culturally safe care overall including writing false notes and making false statements to try to restrain her chemically due to her cultural history
- Failure to demonstrate the principles of open disclosure
- Failure to demonstrate obligations of consent
- Breach of the Quality & Safety Principles 2014
- Breach of Privacy & Confidentiality
- Refusal to report neglect - Nan was left slumped in a chair for 6 hours and refused medical care after a fall, the Deputy Director covered this up for over a year even though I addressed it in writing.
- Retribution to myself for making a complaint to ACQSC most staff and some senior management.
- Obstruction with choice of Dr, pharmacy and medications for care
- Refusal to allow Nan back into her residence from hospital because it was after hours
- Not providing advance care directive on transfer to hospital, backed up by ambulance reports
- Not monitoring pain, not providing accurate pain assessments and denying pain relief
- Not completing SIRS reports on mandatory matters
- Generic care plans without proper support for Nan
- Not reporting incidents accurately or at times at all
- Lying directly to the ACQSC regarding concerns raised by family
- Not providing medical attention as needed
- Not providing appropriate palliative care
- Not documenting medication, falls, pain
- Over 48 missed medications in a 4-week time frame without reporting to GP or NOK
- S8 medication not documented correctly - unable to determine whether morphine was administered, unable to determine what was administered, what dose or why at end-of-life care
- Refusal to call GP daily for a week upon NOK request when Nan was declining /dying
- Refusal to provide pain relief while Nan was dying for the week of her death and the day and night before.

Prior to Nan going into care, she was refused assessment and care at the hospital, the reason they refused assessment as they stated was "she is Aboriginal". I asked the Dr to provide a neuropsychology assessment for Nan as she needed more care, I couldn't provide the level she needed on my own and with what we had in place, we needed the assessment and knew she likely needed to move to care which was distressing in itself. The Dr said outright that she wouldn't take

away her freedom and do the assessment because she was Aboriginal. Nan was in hospital 5 weeks before she was assessed because they refused to give her the treatment she needed, in total it was a 7 week stay, which is very bad for dementia patients. This was also documented and reported to the board of the hospital, and they replied in writing at my request.

We have these systems in place to help us when we're in need, yet when we go to them, do everything they say, write letters in their language with their jargon and can demonstrate that we have a serious issue, we are dismissed and left alone again. I know we are not the only family who have been through this, it's a re- traumatisation. You live through it, try to advocate for yourself and your old people, then you have to prove it, once you do prove it, you are given yet another reason why accountability and justice doesn't apply to you.

We have to stop this and hold the people who are doing harm accountable for what they have chosen to do, more so in these repeated and deliberate acts of violence.

Please let me know if there's more specific information you need and I'll send that across, I'm more than happy to answer any questions you have and I'll do my best to be as flexible as I can to meet the timeframe outlined.

Many thanks, Mel

Gaba Nginda, Mel {Thank/Good you in Gomerói}

Mel Armstrong

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