

## Aged care royal commission told of need to install surveillance to stop elder abuse

BY MATT GARRICK

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PHOTO Christine Weightman suffered injuries after a fall. This image was shown as evidence in the aged care royal commission.

SUPPLIED: ROYAL COMMISSION INTO AGED CARE QUALITY AND SAFETY

A former journalist who watched on helplessly as her dementia patient mother was subjected to "more than any human being should have to suffer" while in aged care has offered fellow Australians a stark piece of advice.

### Key points:

- In a statement to the aged care inquiry, Lisa Backhouse told of her mother's alleged abuse and neglect in a Brisbane aged-care home
- Ms Backhouse has called for those with a vulnerable, elderly person in their lives to install surveillance in their rooms
- She also called for stronger powers to be given to the regulator to better police the industry

"If you have an elderly, vulnerable resident in an aged care centre in Australia today, go out and buy yourself a surveillance camera, and put it in their room," said Lisa Backhouse.

She made the comment on Thursday after presenting a damning statement to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety hearings in Darwin.

Ms Backhouse, who previously worked for the ABC, Channel Nine and Network 10, alleged her mother, Christine Weightman, was hit by carers in her Brisbane care centre, twice.

An old photo of Christine Weightman.



PHOTO Ms Weightman was once a "fiercely independent woman".

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On another occasion she was left to freeze on one of the coldest days of the year without a blanket.

The commission also heard allegations that Ms Weightman, once a "fiercely independent woman", was left lying on the floor of her room for nearly 45 minutes after a fall.

After her mother was allegedly hit, Ms Backhouse pressed an assault charge against the carer.

"I was told my mum had been hit with intent and force, twice on her upper leg," Ms Backhouse alleged in evidence.

"I simply cannot describe the feeling of devastation and powerlessness that this has delivered.

"I had moved to guarantee her safety and instead delivered her further into harm's way."

Ms Backhouse did not specify exactly which Brisbane aged-care centre the abuse allegedly occurred in, but said her mother, now 86, was still a resident there.



PHOTO Lisa Backhouse is calling for better policing of the aged-care sector.

ABC NEWS: MATT GARRICK

## 'Not to spy, but to act as a deterrent'

After the incident, Ms Backhouse decided to take immediate action.

As well as pressing charges, which remain before the courts, she took the seemingly radical move of seeking "permission to install a surveillance camera, infrared and voice activated".

"Not to spy, but to act as a deterrent," she said in her statement.

"Short of moving into the facility and sleeping by her bedside, I just don't know what else to do."

Months later, outside Darwin's Supreme Court, Ms Backhouse has urged others to follow suit.

"I think we really need to shine a light in some very dark corners in the Australian aged-care sector," she said.

"If the facility tells you not [install surveillance], do it anyway.

"The more they try to hide, the more they have to hide — you might be shocked by what you see in there — I certainly was."

She said surveillance equipment — similar to baby monitors — that she had installed was widely available at shopping centre electronics shops, and no longer needed to be hidden like spy gear.



Lisa Backhouse and her mother Christine.

PHOTO Ms Backhouse felt powerless after her mother Christine was involved in a number of incidents while in aged care.

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## Call for greater powers to police

Ms Backhouse's comments came towards the end of a week of royal commission hearings marked by horror stories from within the sector.

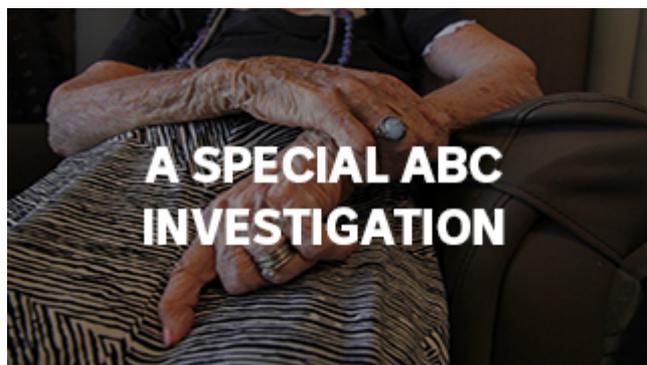
On Wednesday, the commission heard [the story of Nancy Santoro](#), who had an infected wound on her heel left so long without treatment in Melbourne aged-care home Assisi it became infested by maggots.

A day earlier, it heard [the story of dementia patient Shirley Fowler](#), who was left to deteriorate in a New South Wales aged care centre without "independence or dignity".

As these tales of neglect continue to surface from Australia's aged care industry, Ms Backhouse has called for the establishment of a better watchdog to help police the sector.

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She said a 2018 complaint she filed to the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission was answered with "fundamentally inadequate consequences".

The commission on Wednesday heard a similar story of the aged care commission's alleged inaction relating to the treatment of Ms Santoro.

"The regulator has to be given punitive powers in order to be able to fine and penalise nursing homes that fail in their duty of care," Ms Backhouse said.

"And boards need to be held personally and criminally responsible for also failing in their duty of care.

["This is the only way we are really going to be able to force change on the sector."](#)

In her statement, Ms Backhouse described the "current situation [in aged care] is heartbreaking at best, criminal at worst".

"When we look back in years to come, much like the orphanages of yesteryear, this will be our country's greatest shame," she said.

## Minister's office defends penalty regime

The office of Aged Care Minister Richard Colbeck said in January this year, the Commonwealth "established the new Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission to protect and enhance the safety, health, well-being and quality of life of people receiving aged care".

"The Commission's role is to promote high quality care and services to safeguard everyone who is receiving Australian Government funded aged care," a spokesman said.

"In addition, on July 1, 2019, the Government introduced a number of significant reforms to improve the quality of aged care provided by Australian Government funded aged care services."

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