

Integrity Care SA sacks Ann Marie Smith's carer over 'serious misconduct'

By [Alice Dempster](#)

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Ann Marie Smith died in the Royal Adelaide Hospital on April 6. (Supplied: SA Police)

An Adelaide care provider has sacked the carer of Ann Marie Smith, who police say suffered a "disgusting and degrading" death.

In a statement released on Sunday afternoon, Integrity Care SA said it had terminated the carer's employment due to her "serious and wilful misconduct".

"We trusted our carer and believe that we have been completely misled by her," the statement read.

Ms Smith, 54, died on April 6 from severe septic shock, multi-organ failure, severe pressure sores, malnutrition and issues connected with her cerebral palsy after being stuck in a cane chair for 24 hours a day for more than a year.

Ms Smith lived alone at her Kensington Park home in Adelaide's eastern suburbs and relied on a carer for all of her needs.

On Friday, SA Police [declared her death a major crime and opened a manslaughter investigation](#).

Key points:

- Ann Marie Smith died from severe pressure sores and malnutrition, among other complications
- SA Police said she was left sitting in a cane chair 24-hours-a-day for more than a year
- Integrity Care SA said it was "misled" by Ms Smith's carer, who has been sacked

Detective Superintendent Des Bray said Ms Smith had been allowed to die in "disgusting and degrading circumstances".

"Unable to care for herself, she was living her days and sleeping at night in the same woven cane chair in a lounge room for over a year with extremely poor personal hygiene," he said.

"That chair had also become her toilet and there was no fridge in the house and investigators were unable to locate any nutritional food in the house."



Ann Marie Smith's home in Bradman Court, Kensington Park. (Supplied: SA Police)

Superintendent Bray said the carer attended Ms Smith's home on April 5 and called an ambulance after discovering her in a "semi-conscious state".

She was taken to the Royal Adelaide Hospital, where she had major surgery to remove rotting flesh from severe pressure sores on her body.

Integrity Care SA said it was notified of the cause of Ms Smith's death on Friday.

"Since then we have terminated the employment of Ms Smith's carer due to her serious and wilful misconduct."

Welfare checks carried out on other clients

"Patient care is at the heart of everything we do and Integrity Care SA is determined to find out what went so terribly wrong," the organisation's statement read.

"In this regard, prior to the SAPOL announcement on Friday, we already had been conducting our own intense investigation and are continuing to work closely with the NDIS."

Integrity Care said it had now "performed welfare checks" on other clients Ms Smith's carer had involvement with, and said "all those individuals are in good health".

It had also appointed "an independent expert" to review every NDIS participant in its care, including those looked after by Ms Smith's carer.

The carer was suspended as part of that investigation, before being sacked following SAPOL's announcement on Friday.

"Integrity Care SA extends its heartfelt sympathy to Ms Smith's family and encourages anyone with relevant information or concerns to contact Crime Stoppers or the NDIS," the statement read.

"We have been advised not to make any further comment at this stage."

The police investigation into Ms Smith's death is running at the same time as the [Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability](#).

Agency 'had a responsibility' to check on Ms Smith: campaigner

Nicole Lee, a Melbourne-based anti-violence campaigner, who was herself subjected to a decade of abuse by her former husband who was also her disability carer, this week said the case was "shocking and appalling".

She said care agencies have an obligation to see their clients in person regularly and not just rely on a single carer's reports.

"Especially for people who live on their own, such as Ann Marie, who was there by herself," Ms Lee said.

"There should have been — when you think about it, with plan reviews and the NDIA — there should have been people having eyes on her, visibly seeing her.

"It's not good enough just to accept what carers are saying."

Ms Lee said moving forward, it was "integral" that this changed, and suggested care plan reviews and paperwork signing as opportunities for agencies to send other staff to visit clients.



Integrity Care SA said the carer's employment had been terminated due to "serious and wilful misconduct". (ABC News: Mahalia Carter)



Melbourne's Nicole Lee says carers' voices shouldn't be placed above disabled people's. (*You Can't Ask That*)

"Clearly that was not happening for Ann Marie," she said.

"For somebody who lived on their own, and working one-to-one with somebody, she wasn't hiring this person [the carer] privately — she was hiring this person through an agency.

"That agency had a responsibility to be doing something and involving themselves in this person's life, rather than just sending that support worker to and from this person's home."

Ms Lee also said as a community, neighbours need to be raising concerns with authorities.

"I heard the neighbours say several times that they hadn't seen her for 10 years," she said.

"I know if I hadn't seen my neighbours for 10 years, I'd be seriously concerned about 'what was going on, where were they?'

"To think that somebody hasn't left their house for such a long period of time, and nobody thought to say anything ... We, as people in the community, need to be keeping an eye on each other."

She said if people were concerned about their neighbours, they should either knock on their doors to check in, or ask police to perform a welfare check.

"Those sorts of things can't harm anyone and could have saved someone's life," she said.

"The thing is, things weren't fine for this woman, and somebody would have seen something if they had of just knocked on the door or spoken up."

If you or anyone you know needs help

- Lifeline 13 11 14
- Mens Line 1300 789 978
- Kids Helpline 1800 551 800
- 1800 RESPECT 1800 737 732
- National Counselling and Referral Service 1800 421 468 or 02 6146 1468
- Aboriginal Family Domestic Violence Hotline 1800 019 123
- [Find a disability advocate near you](#)