

# Aged care residents giving up due to COVID-19 and isolation, nurses fear

7:30 / By [Kirsten Robb](#)

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Isolation is badly affecting some aged care residents during COVID-19 lockdown.

(Supplied: Penny Stephens/Western Health)

Nurses sent in to help Melbourne's coronavirus-ravaged aged care facilities say they are gravely concerned for residents — even those without COVID-19 infections — who have been stuck in "solitary confinement" for months.

One resident has even refused to eat and drink because she can't see her family or leave her room.

Western Health Clinical Nursing Consultant Shane Durance said he fears there will be a long tail of ongoing deaths in nursing homes due to the pandemic, unrelated to COVID-19 infections.

"We've got people who aren't COVID-positive, whose mood is severely depressed, who are not eating well, who are not drinking adequately, who are predominantly locked in their rooms, not able to go out for any activities, no leisure activities, and their mobility is declining and their mood is declining," he told 7.30.

"And for someone who's already elderly, already has a mood disorder, already is mildly malnourished — it's very hard to come back from that."

## Key points:

- Nurses are reporting that aged care residents are giving up due to COVID-19 isolation
- Some residents are not eating, drinking or taking their medication
- There are concerns that the effects of isolation could last beyond the length of the pandemic

## 'Not eating, not drinking, refusing to take medicine'



Nurse Shane Durance warns that there could still be many more deaths in nursing homes even if the pandemic ends. (Supplied: Penny Stephens/Western Health)

Mr Durance used the example of one patient, who he referred to as Jill.

"Jill is in a residential aged care facility and she's been there for quite some time, primarily because she suffers from Alzheimer's, dementia, and an associated mood disorder and depression," he said.

"When we put her into lockdown, trying to protect her from this virus, all of those things became much, much worse."

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He said despite her Alzheimer's, Jill was very articulate about her wishes.

"She was able to tell me quite outright that she was not eating, not drinking and refusing to take her medication simply because she was happy to die and would rather die than live like this," Mr Durance said.

"From her point of view she had been put into solitary confinement and we all know what solitary confinement will do to a healthy person.

"Jill is not the only person or the only resident I've come across that felt like this."

Mr Durance said there was more that could be done for aged care residents during lockdown, including the federal government investing more money in leisure therapists, physios and physical activity.

"We could provide additional staffing so as to ensure that patients were allowed to be taken out of the garden and supervision for at least an hour a day — I mean,

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- [Kids Helpline](#) on 1800 551 800
- [MensLine Australia](#) on 1300 789 978
- [Suicide Call Back Service](#) on 1300 659 467
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surely, a prisoner gets at least that."

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## 'Long tail of ongoing death rates'



Shane Durance says aged care facilities should spend more money on therapy and physical activity. (Supplied: Penny Stephens/Western Health)

Mr Durance said aside from the effects of the virus itself, isolation had detrimental effects on its own.

"It affects their mood. It affects their desire to eat, their desire to drink," he said.

"They go to bed, they stop walking, progressively they lose the ability to walk.

"My concern is that, although the death rates in residential care patients will start to slow, then we'll see a very long tail of ongoing death rates.

"And they won't be attributed to COVID and they'll drop off the front page of the newspapers."

Mr Durance said he feared governments and the broader public would lose sight of the issue and would fail to properly review what went wrong.

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- [When and how to wear a face mask](#)
- [The symptoms](#)
- [The number of cases in Australia](#)
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## Infection control still poor

Another Western Health nurse also warned proper infection control is still an issue in some aged care homes, with cross contamination from the positive unit to the negative unit still taking place.

The nurse, who wished only to be known by her first name Christine, said infection control was still very poor at, at least one facility.

"Today they had all the dirty linen in the positive [area]," she told 730.

"They still haven't had all their rubbish removed, there's probably 50 or 60 rubbish bags down the side way.

"It's a fire risk as well as an infection control risk."

Christina said she had asked management about staffing numbers at night and was told there was only one registered nurse rostered for the whole facility.

"So that means that one registered nurse is going into and out of the positive to the negative [area], so I'll be really surprised if there's not a lot of positive [cases] tomorrow."

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