

Children of Regis aged care facility residents who died speak out about 'culture of neglect'

By [Rebecca Turner](#)

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Yvonne Buters has raised concerns about the aged care system and wants to see an overhaul. (ABC News: Hugh Sando)

A wound on the left heel of Yvonne Buters' 91-year-old father ultimately killed him.

It took staff at Regis Nedlands aged care facility five days to check the injury, which developed into a necrotic foot ulcer and saw Henk Niemen die of septicaemia in hospital in February 2017 aged 91.

Henk's wife, Rose, had died four months earlier after four nights of falling out of bed.

She died sitting in a chair next to her husband in the room they shared at the aged care home.

Ms Buters believes a "culture of neglect" at his Perth nursing home — which was at the centre of allegations of elder abuse allegations earlier this year — led to his deterioration and death.

Key points:

- Ms Buters' father died at Regis Nedlands, which was subject to a police investigation
- There had been allegations staff were physically assaulting residents
- WA Police found no evidence of criminality, but families say there is a "culture of neglect"



Yvonne Buters's parents Henk and Rose Nieman lived at the Regis Nedlands home.
(Supplied)

An investigation by the Aged Care Complaints Commissioner, which handled complaints before the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission was established, after complaints by Ms Buters found "serious failings in the care of your parents".

"The lack of appropriate skin care provided to your father prior to the detection of his heel wound was likely to have been a contributing factor to its deterioration," the commissioner found.

In the case of Mrs Niemen, not all of the falls were recorded in incident reports or reported to her family and there was not always a sensor mat by her bed, which alerts staff to falls, as recommended by medical professionals.

Serious concerns remain after investigation

The blowtorch of public scrutiny was firmly trained on Regis Nedlands last month, when news broke [police were investigating allegations staff were physically assaulting residents](#), including two elderly men who died within days of each other.

But while the heat soon faded after WA Police announced [they had found no evidence of criminality](#), serious concerns remain about Regis Nedlands and its care of its vulnerable residents.



The Regis aged care facility in Nedlands was at the centre of elderly abuse allegations.
(ABC News: Herlyn Kaur)

For the second time in 14 months, the federal aged care regulator has found there is an "immediate and severe risk to the health, safety or wellbeing of residents" at the nursing home in Perth's wealthy western suburbs.

The findings do not come as a surprise to Ms Buters or for another family, who believed substandard care at another Regis facility contributed to their parents' deaths.

They say the "culture of neglect", where seemingly small oversights can lead to devastating consequences in frail elderly people with complex health problems, and their concerns were not always taken seriously.

'Clinical gaps' in pain management for resident

Amina Schipp says Regis Woodlands failed to properly manage her mother's medication, as well as repeated unwitnessed and unreported falls resulting in fractures in the winter of 2019.



Amina Schipp said the last three weeks of her mother Maria's life were "torture".
(Supplied)

Maria Oliveri Dell-Castillo was 98 years old, requiring high levels of care for her many health conditions like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, which made her vulnerable to chest infections, and osteoporosis.

She died after being taken to hospital with pneumonia.

After Ms Schipp made a complaint, the aged care regulator found there were "clinical gaps" in how her falls were handled, including neurological observations and pain management, and there was a three-day delay in ensuring she received antibiotics.

"I know Mum was old and she was going to go at some stage but she didn't need to go like that," she said.

"The last three weeks of her life were absolute torture."

Regis completed comprehensive investigation, company says

A Regis Aged Care spokesman said the company completed a comprehensive investigation of Ms Buters's complaints, working through the process with the family in a transparent manner.

He said the company also took immediate action to address Ms Schipp's concerns.



The regulator found there were "clinical gaps" in how Ms Oliveria Dell-Castillo's falls were handled. *(Supplied)*

The company's inquiry into allegations of physical assault, which was being led by an external investigator, should be finished by mid-March with findings reported to residents and families.

Some of the clinical care issues raised by the women — the management of falls, pain and wounds — are also at the heart of the current investigation into Regis Nedlands by the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission.

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The aged care home is [still under a sanction by the regulator, meaning it will not be funded to take any new admissions for six months.](#)

The regulator has identified key areas of clinical care as well as human resources and governance which must be brought up to national standards to avoid further penalties.

'People don't go into aged care for retirement'

Professor Davina Porock, who runs the Centre for Research in Aged Care at Edith Cowan University, said clinical care was the main reason the vast majority of people moved into aged care.

"People don't go into aged care for retirement. They go there for complex clinical need," she said.

"But because they're living there, we want them to be in an environment where they are living well as well as being looked after in terms of their dependencies and frailties and things like wound management, medications etc."

Dr Porock said high-level skills were required to assess a clinically deteriorating patient, a level of training not held by all aged care staff.



Families say they still have concerns with Regis' care of vulnerable residents. (ABC News: Herlyn Kaur)

"The problem that we have, which has been repeatedly shown in the royal commission for aged care quality and safety is that there are not enough well-trained and educated nursing staff in these facilities," she said.

"And the access to general practitioners is so limited that people just get whisked off to hospital.

"No disrespect for hospital care but hospitals are not a good place for an older person to be, especially if they've got dementia."

Response 'does not address' root of problem

Regis Nedlands' sanction is a step further than the "serious risk" finding, relating to the personal and clinical care of residents, made in November 2019.

In that case, the regulator had determined by February 2020 that Regis Nedlands had improved and once again met aged care standards.



Ms Buters said poor documentation by staff also hampered investigations. (ABC News: Hugh Sando)

But Ms Buters said the role of the regulator was limited by legislation to helping aged care homes to comply with standards and not fix problems.

In response to her complaint, the complaints commissioner advised her that Regis had updated its falls management policy and

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procedures, as well as training.

But Ms Buters said this response did not address the root cause of the problem.

"Either they were too busy and had not enough staff or there weren't enough mats," she said.

"Updating your policies and procedures and training is not going to help if you don't have enough mats to put on the floor or you don't have anybody to put the mat on the floor."

Ms Buters said poor documentation by staff also hampered investigations.

For example, the commissioner's report said that Regis could not explain why her father's heel wound did not receive any care for five days.

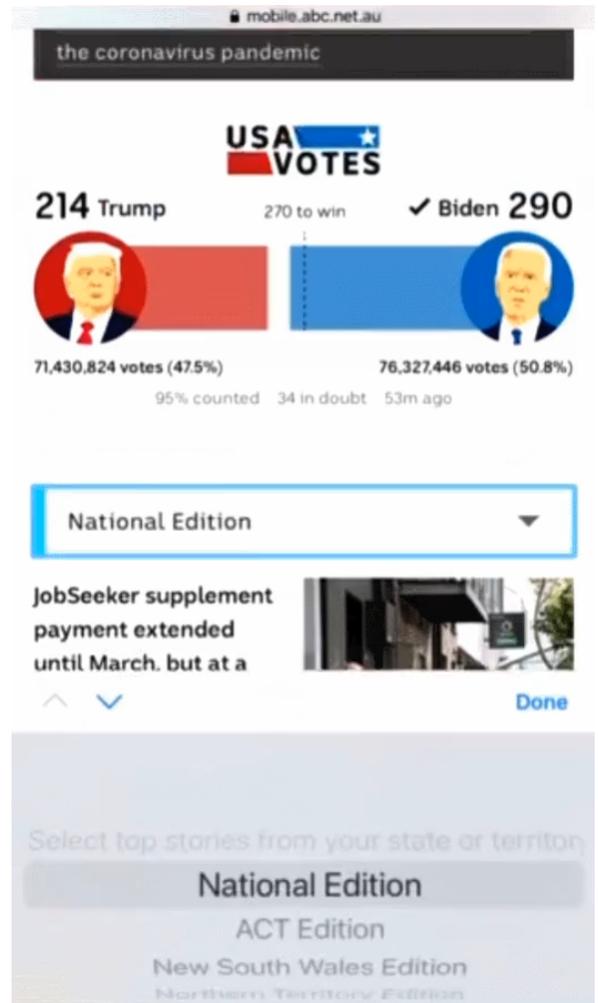
"[Regis] said that it investigated this at the time and could not conclusively determine why this occurred," it said.

"It was unable to identify whether the dressings were completed and not documented, not completed and therefore not documented or a combination of both."

Both Ms Schipp and Ms Buters said they hoped the final report of the aged care royal commission, being handed down next Friday, will recommend giving the regulator stronger powers to investigate complaints, mandate levels of staff, especially more highly trained professionals, and ensure that families are given more information when choosing an aged care facility.

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