

Review into Roy Fagan Centre, where dementia patient was found with maggot-infested wounds, highlights staff shortages

By Adam Langenberg

Posted 21h ago, updated 21h ago



The Roy Fagan Centre is in Lenah Valley in Hobart's north. (ABC News: Luke Bowden)

A report into Tasmania's top mental health facility found that care for a 78-year-old dementia patient was "well below an acceptable level" in the 24 hours before he was discovered with maggot-infested wounds.

The report found the care at the Roy Fagan Centre for the man throughout the rest of his admission was "satisfactory", as was the overall level of care provided to other residents.

The state government commissioned the report after family members of the man discovered the maggots during a Christmas Day visit last year.

Most of the report into the maggot incident was redacted at the request of the man's family, but it found that it occurred due to a "culmination of

Key points:

- Health Minister Jeremy Rockliff says he takes "full responsibility" for the incident and has again apologised to the patient's family
- The report makes 13 findings, including that the level of care for residents at the Roy Fagan Centre is satisfactory overall

numerous factors", including staff unavailability, insufficient resourcing and the education and training of staff.

- The government has accepted all six recommendations, including delivering a "new level of resourcing" for the centre



Health Minister Jeremy Rockliff says he has apologised to the man's family. (ABC News: Luke Bowden)

Mental Health Minister Jeremy Rockliff said the Roy Fagan Centre has since implemented new protocols for wound care, revised care plans and improved patient handover practices.

Mr Rockliff said he took full responsibility for the incident, and that the government accepted all the report's findings and recommendations.

"On behalf of the Tasmanian government, I unreservedly apologise to the patient's family," he said.

"I have done that when the incident occurred and I spoke to the family again ... and once again apologised for the distress and the traumatic events that occurred on Christmas Day last year, and I know it's been deeply distressing for all involved."

Centre 'inadequate' for some patients

The report made 13 findings, including that the facility had no contemporary model of care, had a shortage of nursing staff to deal with the "variety and complexity of patient need", and that there was an "overall significant deficit" of allied health staff.

The nursing staff shortage meant that patients who required two staff members to be fed, clothed, bathed or showered may not have some of those things occur, the report found, because it would lead to other residents having no one to care for them during that time.

It said making those decisions was "a distressing choice for staff to make, day after day".

Health and Community Services Union secretary Tim Jacobson said most of the issues in the report were well-known, including staff shortages and a lack of a model of care.

"The Roy Fagan Centre, unfortunately, has featured on our radar on more than one occasion over the last 20 odd years," he said.

"Unfortunately, we've seen staffing levels reduce, a high level of casualisation, part-time employment, we've seen a lot of staff leave, very ageing demographic in terms of provision of mental health services and an inability to attract, particularly, specialist nursing staff."

The report found the Roy Fagan Centre was "both out of date and inadequate" for some patients who are admitted to the facility, including some patients with severe dementia, and those with a combination of mental health issues and other health problems that required hospital attention.



The health union says most of the issues highlighted in the report were already well known. *(ABC News: Luke Bowden)*

Chief psychiatrist Aaron Groves, who authored the report, said a new specialist facility was required in the state for those dementia patients with the most complex mental health needs, categorised as having "tier seven" behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia (BPSD).

"There's a small group of people who need another service that we just don't have yet in Tasmania," he said.

"When part of the sector is unable to provide the services for a small number of people, then another part needs to take over and sometimes that's meant that bigger states where there might be more of a need have been able to address it earlier, while smaller states such as Tasmania develop it when it really becomes required.

"And I think that what the report shows is that that's now required going forward."

The report also found there had been a lack of investment in Older Persons Mental Health Services in the state, despite it being projected "to see the greatest growth in demand" given Tasmania's ageing population.

It found not enough attention had been paid to planning or prioritisation of the services, and that it had "not been developed to include the full range of service elements."

Report recommends better resourcing

The report made six recommendations, including that Older Persons Mental Health Services have its own dedicated leadership and be funded to deliver a "full range of service elements", and a comprehensive system of clinical governance.

It also recommends a model of care be developed for the Roy Fagan Centre based on "a new level of resourcing adequate to undertake the roles it will need to deliver in the next 10 years."

Mr Rockliff said the government had committed to better resourcing the centre and Older Persons Mental Health Services in the state but did not yet know how many staff would need to be employed, or what it would cost.

"My view is when it is known exactly what resources are required, I will have no hesitation obviously in ensuring that those resources are forthcoming," he said.

"Clearly there were gaps in care related to a number of factors and I
have to take responsibility for that."

Health stakeholders said the cost of staffing the centre to an adequate level would be multiple millions of dollars a year.

Australian Medical Association Tasmania vice-president John Saul welcomed the review.

"The report makes it clear that there is a need for more nursing and allied health staff to keep the quality of care at the level every Tasmanian should expect for themselves or their family requiring the care of the Roy Fagan Centre," Dr Saul said.

"What is clear is that additional resources to employ more staff with specialist skills in caring for older people with mental health issues are required to meet increasing demand for these services and ensure quality care can be provided at all times."

Dr Saul said staff at the Roy Fagan Centre are dedicated to their patients, who often have "challenging care needs", but more specialist medical practitioners were needed to support them.



Advocacy Tasmania's Leanne Groombridge criticised the report for not taking in the views of residents. (*ABC News: Luke Bowden*)

Advocacy Tasmania chief executive Leanne Groombridge said it "beggars belief" that the report had failed to speak to residents at the facility.

"There's case notes, there's interviews with staff, there's medical professionals who've been interviewed but what is actually missing yet again ... are the actual Tasmanians who have been directly affected," she said.

"Yet again there is no voice of the actual people who are enduring these conditions, nor, I might add, have there been any attempts to go to advocacy organisations such as ours who actually interact with these people."