

# Care home closed amid allegations of bullying, abuse and poor food

By [Royce Millar](#) and [Jewel Topsfield](#)

July 5, 2022 – 6.59pm

The Andrews government has extended its crackdown on privately run disability homes in Victoria, closing a second facility in Melbourne's north-west after findings of bullying, coercion and abuse of vulnerable residents.

Human Services Regulator director Anthony Kolmus said he took the action to protect the health and wellbeing of residents at Sydenham Grace after an investigation uncovered 23 serious contraventions of the Supported Residential Services (Private Proprietors) Act 2010.



Former Sydenham Grace and Gracemanor manager Parvinder Kaur says the allegations are unfounded. EDDIE JIM

“This is the culmination of an extensive investigation by my team to protect the welfare of residents,” Kolmus said.

The investigation found evidence of problems including bullying and intimidation of residents; unsafe, unhygienic and uninhabitable living conditions; poor quality and insufficient quantity of food; inadequate provision of personal and health care; the opening of private mail; and the forging of residents' signatures.

The deregistration of Sydenham Grace follows the appointment of administrators Ernst and Young in January and the [deregistration](#) of a sister facility, Gracemanor, in June.

Sydenham Grace and Gracemanor share the same proprietor that the regulator determined was not suitable to operate and support residential service on conduct and character grounds.

There are 114 supported residential services in Victoria. Last year, the regulator conducted 158 inspections and issued 110 compliance notices to 24 services.

An investigation by *The Age* last year [highlighted](#) widespread problems and poor living conditions in some supported residential services, which are state-regulated but privately run.

In September 2020, the Victorian government placed another supported residential facility, Hambleton House in Albert Park, into administration after a COVID-19 outbreak revealed shocking conditions, including uncapped needles, mattresses stained with bodily fluids, and spoiled food.

*The Age* also [revealed](#) last year that Sydenham Grace and Gracemanor were caught up in an ugly turf war with a rival disability provider over the right to access residents' lucrative NDIS funding packages, with allegations of abuse.

Former Sydenham Grace and Gracemanor manager Parvinder Kaur said the department had revoked the second licence despite withdrawing many allegations since the administrators were appointed.

She said that of the remaining allegations, including bullying, intimidation and forging signatures, the department had produced no evidence.

On the issue of food quantity and quality, Kaur said 74 residents had lived at the two facilities over the past two years but that the department had relied on the statements of just two residents.

Kaur said the department had deregistered the two facilities supposedly in the public interest.

“But who is the public here? Are the disabled residents, being uprooted from their long-standing homes, not the public?”



Bryan Lipmann, chief executive of Wintringham, believes supported residential services should not be privatised.

Wintringham, Australia’s largest aged care provider for the homeless, was commissioned by the government to manage the two facilities during administration while alternative accommodation was found for residents.

The government also commissioned the provider to re-house residents from Hambleton House in late 2020.

Bryan Lipmann, the chief executive of Wintringham and a former Melburnian of the Year, said he was glad the government was strengthening regulation of supported residential services but that without more sweeping reform of the sector, many of society’s most vulnerable citizens would continue to live in appalling conditions.

He said the housing and care for such people should not be in private hands.

“It is a matter of luck whether our most vulnerable and forgotten citizens end up in one of these shitholes or living a good life in somewhere decent like Wintringham. That’s not a system. These places should not exist,” Lipmann said.

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