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# Kilsyth aged care Kirkbrae Presbyterian Home coronavirus outbreak

Nurses have described “chaotic and deeply disturbing” conditions inside a Kilsyth nursing home under siege from a massive COVID outbreak. It has led the nurses union to recommend urgent industry changes.

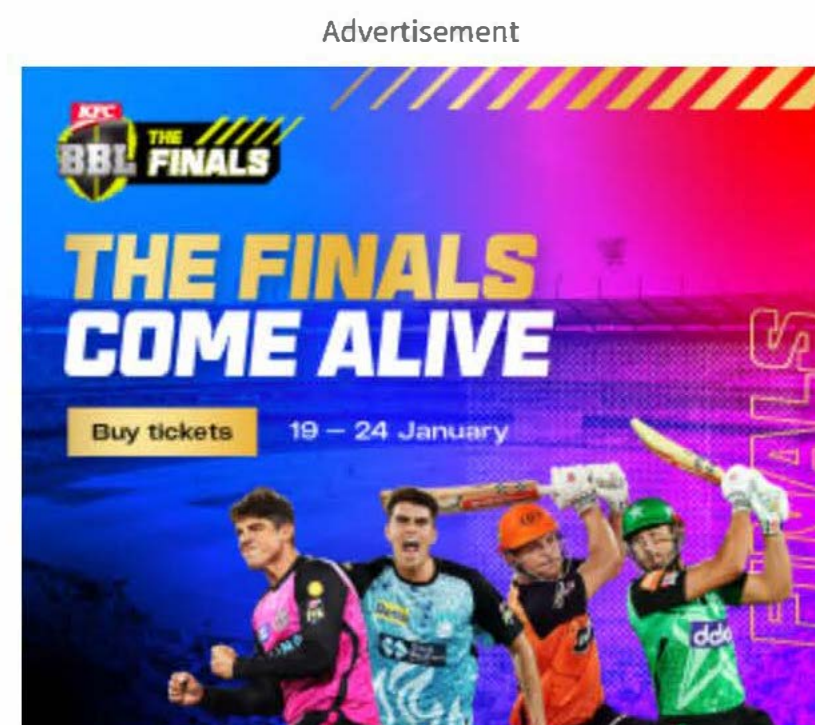
Laura Armitage [Follow](#)

@lauzi\_83 3 min read August 24, 2020 - 7:31PM Lilydale & Yarra Valley Leader

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Kirkbrae Presbyterian Homes' outbreak has been linked to 138 COVID cases. Picture: Ian Currie



When registered nurses from Eastern Health stepped through the doors of a Kilsyth nursing home riddled with coronavirus, the smell of rotting flowers was so thick they could barely breathe.

That day was described by one nurse as the “shift from hell”.

Elderly residents with coronavirus were evacuated from [Kirkbrae Presbyterian Homes](#) and taken to nearby hospitals on July 28 after a directive from Department Health and Human Services.

A group of three nurses were sent in to take over from the centre's staff and what they saw was “chaotic and deeply distressing”.

The details of the state of the outer east home were relayed to the Victorian Parliament's Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's inquiry into the Government's coronavirus response on August 11 by the Australian Nursing and Midwifery (Victorian Branch) secretary Lisa Fitzpatrick.

The Kirkbrae outbreak is the fourth worst in a Victorian aged care centre and has been linked to 138 cases so far.

Leader has not been able to confirm how many deaths have resulted from the outbreak.

At the inquiry Ms Fitzpatrick said while there were no regular staff on site, as they were all deemed close contacts and in isolation, no one from the home's management came to help with handover.

Ms Fitzpatrick said the three nurses were relying on a 16-page handover document that had mismatched some resident names and room numbers and had wrongly stated the number of infections.

“The only PPE available onsite was surgical masks and gowns — there were no N95 masks, no face shields and the gloves were disposable kitchen ones,” she said.

“There was no one to answer the constantly ringing phone.”

She said one “poor cleaner” was trying his hardest to empty all the small bins filled with used PPE in the corridor.

“It was difficult to breathe because the smell from putrid flowers rotting in vases was so strong,” she said.

Ms Fitzpatrick said the workload for the three nurses was so intense it took until 1.40pm to finish their first round.

“They were faced with attempting to wake 30 residents, get them sitting up and ready for breakfast,” she said.

“Before breakfast they had to change soiled bed linen and wash and change soiled residents.

“Many residents required feeding which takes time.”

She said the nurses had to assess residents, dress wounds and pressure sores.

“One resident had oral thrush so severe they were concerned he may not be able to swallow,” Ms Fitzpatrick said.

She said the food, delivered at 11.30am, had gone cold by the time the nurses could feed the residents after tending to the immediate duties.

“This is in no way the fault of the Kirkbrae nursing or personal care worker staff,” Ms Fitzpatrick said.

“It is the result of not having enough registered and enrolled nurses on every shift and not having a pandemic plan.”

Ms Fitzpatrick said in order to fix these issues the Government needed to legislate so private aged care providers used the \$13 billion in public funding to hire a safe number of registered and enrolled nurses, and personal care workers.

“Let's be very clear — just handing over more funding will not fix the systemic failure of private aged care providers to roster safe numbers of registered and enrolled nurses to work with personal carers to provide clinical care to vulnerable, frail residents with complex conditions and comorbidities,” she said.

But Presbyterian Church of Victoria moderator Colin Morrow said management were just following the guidelines set out by the State Government.

Mr Morrow said when the outbreak happened people were acting in accordance with the Victorian Government's advice to prepare for a potential 40 per cent of staff to be affected in a coronavirus outbreak.

“But 93 per cent of staff were affected,” he said.

“Forty tested positive for COVID and all the rest bar five were close contacts.”

Mr Morrow said there were a number of staff who were not returning either out of fear or because they were worried people they cared for had died of coronavirus.

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