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Transcript: AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, Sky News Live, *Hinch with Derryn Hinch*, Thursday 3 October 2019

Subject: Aged Care

DERRYN HINCH: One of the terrible indictments to come out of the public hearing of the Aged Care Royal Commission is those shocking revelations about under-staffing, and patient neglect, and poor food, and a man with maggots in his ears. They don't come as a shock to a lot of us. And that's why nurses and a few of us politicians pushed for staff ratios and for the setting up of the Royal Commission in the first place.

Now, for the latest, I'm joined by the President of the AMA in the studio. Tony Bartone, good evening.

TONY BARTONE: Good evening, Derryn.

DERRYN HINCH: That's an awful indictment, isn't it? That what we've thought- awful stories are coming out and that was why we had to have a Royal Commission.

TONY BARTONE: And the Commission justified its existence, you might say, just in the very first few days. But we've seen stories and nightly headlines and news grabs continually tell us about the issues confronting us and the lack of care, the failure of regulations, and the failure of access to the appropriate dignity and respect.

DERRYN HINCH: The biggest question I keep getting from people since we started - when I was back as a Senator - people say: the big private companies, they get billions of dollars in government subsidies, in taxpayers' money, where the hell does it all go? I mean, we're talking billions of dollars.

TONY BARTONE: And this is really a very important point. On one hand, we know that there is going to be a significant increase in funding required because that's the root cause of the problem here, of many of the problems. However, what's happening is that that funding that they're already receiving doesn't seem to be making it through to the frontline in many cases, especially in the example you've just articulated, and it's going through to the bottom line [audio skip] and that's not acceptable.

DERRYN HINCH: Where there's a company like Bupa and they have so many complaints against them, and they're probably the major player in the field, it shows to me there's something rotten in the state of Denmark. I mean, something has to be done and you hope, I know the Royal Commissioner's Report will come down very soon - we'll have the first one, yeah.

TONY BARTONE: Well, the Commission's findings have been extended right out till November 2020. There will be a draft interim report released before then. But we've heard enough already - and that's been the message this week to the Government. And in association with the nurses, we've made it very clear that care can't wait any longer. We need to invest and facilitate some of the clear recommendations that will obviously come out. We're not trying to

preempt the Commission's Report. The Commission needs to work right through all the submissions, work through all the stories of neglect, of harm, of abuse, that will come out in due course. But we need to- we can't let people suffer in silence in the interim. We've got to start that process of real...

DERRYN HINCH: [Talks over] Now.

TONY BARTONE: ...respecting and do it now. Absolutely.

DERRYN HINCH: Well, look, I sort of figured just the other day, maybe even yesterday, that people are encouraged - this is good - to stay in home care if you can. You'd be in your own home or be with family. There's a better quality of life for you - if it can be done, which sounds nice. But there's more than 100,000 people waiting for home care and the waiting list is up to two years long. So something's not working.

TONY BARTONE: And that's exactly right. So, it's just under 120,000 Australians are waiting for various levels of home care packages. Home care packages keep them out of the residential aged care facilities, so it's a much cheaper option for the Government, it's a much happier option for the Australians because we all know that they really do want to stay at home in the comfort of their own home where possible. They want to be part of their community, of the environment where they've grown up, and with access to the doctors and other ancillary staff that they come to rely upon in that environment. They don't want to lose that access to their friends and to their neighbours. So, if we can keep them at home, it's got to be a better solution.

But as you say, up to two years' wait, and 16,000 Australians died waiting for a home care package last year - 16,000.

DERRYN HINCH: [Talks over] 16,000.

TONY BARTONE: So that's just totally unacceptable in a country like ours. And it's about ensuring that these stories become front and centre and very much ingrained into the public community as a whole. Because if they start to also proclaim loudly, then maybe the politicians will act a little bit sooner, rather than waiting for the Aged Care Commission to report.

DERRYN HINCH: Yes. So I'd be sitting in the Senate one day and they're proudly saying, yes, there'd been another 10,000 aged care places placed this year. Ten thousand, when you've got 120, 130,000 on the waiting list, that is not a solution, and that's nothing to be proud of.

TONY BARTONE: And 10,000 is an enormous [audio skip] but we still need a lot more, and we need to make sure that we've got more doctors, more nurses, more allied health professionals working in these facilities in a quality and skills mix-coordinated approach, delivering the best of care in a coordinated environment so that the patient, so that the resident, is at the centre of all of that and is cared for with the respect and dignity that they deserve.

DERRYN HINCH: Yeah. This is not quite in your bailiwick, although it comes down to the health of people who are not in home care but actually in nursing places, and that is that the

average spend on food, daily food, is \$6 and 7 cents a day. When I was in jail, we got paid more than \$10 a day. So something is bad there when that's going on.

TONY BARTONE: And wearing my doctor's hat, the nutritional component of a \$6 a day diet, you've got to really wonder, especially for folk that really are very much challenged in their medical needs - they usually have other medical conditions, require specific tailor-made diets or tailor-made solutions to their nutrition - and protein and all the other key components are essential parts of a nutritious, balanced diet, more so for them than for any other member of the population.

DERRYN HINCH: And the fresh vegetables and the fresh fruit and the fresh juice, et cetera. We get photos emailed to us saying: would you let your mother or father eat this? And it's things that look like muck, you got the party pies for dinner or this and that sort of thing, something you couldn't even know what the food was.

TONY BARTONE: And this just goes to the heart of the problem. Somewhere, as you say, something's not right when at the end of the day they're constrained, these providers and many of the private smaller and not-for-profit ones are doing it extremely tough and they are really not- they're not making a buck but they're constrained to have to deliver this kind of care. And that's what we're trying to say. Regulations and funding shouldn't be forcing providers [audio skip] in this environment to our older Australians who deserve every avenue and access to care.

DERRYN HINCH: [interrupts] Well, the argument is - I mean I pushed for a motion which got knocked back in the Senate for ratios of nursing and other staff ratios and I know the nurses' unions, plural, have also been pushing very hard for that. The operators say: we can't afford it. Now, something's wrong.

TONY BARTONE: Again, it comes down to the root problem of funding. The operators, some are genuinely not able to make the funding dollars meet at the moment, but it's clear - whatever the outcomes of the Royal Commission - it's clear that they're going to be recommending that we need more doctors, more nurses, more allied health professionals working in that team environment, and whichever way you cut and dice it...

DERRYN HINCH: Yeah.

TONY BARTONE: ...we're going to in the end have to actually spend significant amounts of money to ensure that we're providing that quality skills mix of ratio of staff to residents.

DERRYN HINCH: [interrupts] As I've said many times, the only difference between politicians and old people is they got [audio skip] they sometimes, they tend to forget that. The, and pardon my ignorance, but has the AMA made a submission to all this?

TONY BARTONE: Yes, we have made a submission and it was made public on Monday - 53 pages, 41 recommendations...

DERRYN HINCH: [Talks over] I'll dig it out.

TONY BARTONE: ...we really gone very, very much to the whole breadth of the problems, and it'll be one of many, obviously, that the Commission will have to read through and to contemplate in its final deliberations.

DERRYN HINCH: Good to talk to you again. I'll dig it out and have a read of it. So that's good. Thanks, Tony.

TONY BARTONE: Our pleasure.

DERRYN HINCH: Thank you very much.

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