

National Aged Care Alliance

Federal Election Platform

June 2007

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About the National Aged Care Alliance

The National Aged Care Alliance (the Alliance) is a representative body of 26 peak national organisations in aged care including consumer groups, providers, unions, and health professionals, working together to achieve a more positive future for the aged care sector in Australia.

The Alliance was formed in April 2000, and has developed a united policy agenda to achieve better outcomes for the care of older people in Australia.

Alliance members are concerned about the future sustainability and funding of aged care services, and are seeking the establishment of industry wide benchmarks of care.

The Alliance's vision for aged care in Australia is that:

All older people in Australia have access to planned, properly resourced and integrated quality aged care services that are flexible, equitable, that recognise diversity and promote choice and respect for users and workers.

The Alliance is making its priorities for aged care available to encourage informed discussion on matters of concern in aged care and to articulate our vision for a future of quality aged care services in Australia. Federal election candidates may contact Alliance members to discuss in more detail the issues included in these statements and individual organisation's own policy initiatives.

The following organisations are members of the Alliance:

Aged and Community Services Australia; Aged Care Association Australia; Alzheimer's Australia; Anglicare Australia; Australian Association of Gerontology; Australian General Practice Network; Australian Healthcare Association; Australian Medical Association; Australian Nursing Federation; Australian Pensioners' and Superannuants' Federation; Australian Physiotherapy Association; Australian and New Zealand Society for Geriatric Medicine; Baptist Care Australia; Carers' Australia; Catholic Health Australia; COTA Over 50s (Councils on the Ageing); Diversional Therapy Association of Australia; Geriaction; Health Services Union; Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union; Lutheran Aged Care Australia; OT Australia; Pharmacy Guild of Australia; Royal Australian College of General Practitioners; Royal College of Nursing Australia; and UnitingCare Australia.

More information about the Alliance is available on its website: www.naca.asn.au.

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Health and Integrated Systems

Older people need fair and equitable access to the full range of health services for optimal independence and wellbeing to be achieved. Progress toward a continuum of care for older people requires policies and strategies across the acute, community and residential aged care settings. Health and aged care services need to be integrally linked to achieve a system of services where access is determined by the needs of people, rather than the particular point of contact or service setting, taking into account culture, geography and means.

In order to avoid unnecessary hospitalisation people need to be able to receive more complex health care in non acute settings than is now the case. This requires substantially more Australian Government resources than are now available.

The Alliance is calling for:

- dedicated funding to implement initiatives that will prevent unnecessary admissions of older people to acute care services, for example: hospital in the home, and residential and transitional care initiatives;
- access to dental care for all older people;
- inclusion of transport in the Australian Health Care Agreements to ensure access to health care services in all settings¹;
- renewal of the commitment to Dementia as a National Health Priority with additional funding for a further 5 years from 2009; and
- improved funding for ACATs:
 - to address current delays in assessment; and
 - to provide timely access to specialist geriatric and palliative care services².

1 See National Aged Care Alliance position paper Transport and access to health care services for older Australians. May 2007. http://www.naca.asn.au/Publications/NACA_transport_0507.pdf

2 See National Aged Care Alliance paper AHMAC and Beyond - A Strategic Framework for Health Care for Older People: At home, in residential care, in hospital and in transition between settings. May 2006. http://www.naca.asn.au/pdf/AHMAC_and_beyond.pdf

2 Residential Aged Care

Recurrent funding for residential aged care and the current indexation formula form an inadequate basis on which to provide quality care and does not reflect the real cost of care provision.

Quality buildings are essential for quality care. Residential aged care services should be modern efficient safe and sensitive to cultural and environmental factors. The capital needs for provision and maintenance of quality buildings and amenities on an ongoing basis are currently not being met.

The Alliance is calling for:

- the Australian Government to review and identify a solution to the long term capital needs of residential aged care which recognises the actual cost of new and replacement buildings;
- the introduction of a care subsidy based on a properly costed benchmark of care and indexed to address the cost pressures on the residential aged care sector in the delivery of quality care; and
- increased dedicated funding for the delivery of health care by primary health care providers in residential aged care services. This will enable:
 - the delivery of effective hospital in the nursing home programs;
 - the development of clinical practice guidelines and treatment pathways; and
 - the development of properly equipped consultation and treatment rooms within residential aged care services.

3 Community Care

Community Care is a cornerstone of the care system. Community services provide the means for older people or younger people with disabilities to stay at home longer and maximise independence and autonomy. Well designed and well resourced community care services should build on the capacities of individuals, families, carers and social networks. The Alliance welcomes the greater priority given to the expansion of community services in recent years. However, there is an urgent need to build on this progress.

The Alliance is calling for:

- an increase in the number and resourcing of Australian Government funded care packages to ensure they meet the range of current and projected care needs across a continuum from low to high within the community;
- the provision for annual growth of the Home and Community Care Program in real terms of at least 10% per annum;
- the removal of inconsistencies between the Home and Community Care Program and Australian Government packages - different systems, different services, different quality and care accreditation standards, and different funding rules; and
- additional funding to increase support services for carers and families, including education, training and access to health and bereavement services.

4 Workforce

Quality aged care, both residential and community based, cannot be achieved without a skilled and qualified workforce, which is clearly defined, accurately costed, fully funded, and appropriately rewarded and valued. The increasing dependency and complex needs of older people in receipt of aged care services, including those with dementia and palliative care needs, requires adequate staffing levels. Staffing levels and skills mix in aged care services should be driven primarily by the aim of achieving optimal health and quality of life outcomes. Appropriate staffing levels are necessary to ensure providers and staff meet their duty of care as well as enabling them to manage complex care needs which include dementia and palliative care.

The Alliance is calling for:

- a transparent mechanism, accompanied by sufficient dedicated funding, to achieve and maintain comparable wages and working conditions with the acute health care sector for all staff working in residential and community aged care, commensurate with responsibilities;
- dedicated funding to ensure all staff in aged care have access to education and training that furthers their qualifications and skill levels, together with funded strategies to facilitate attendance barriers such as replacement staffing, reimbursing travel time and costs and provision for clinical placements; and
- the funding of a research project to examine current industry practice in terms of skill mix and staffing levels, linked to needs of residents and client dependency, in quality residential and community aged care with a view to establishing effective benchmarks.

5 Information Communication Technology

Information technology is now accepted as an essential tool for care planning and provision, communication and management. Integrated information communication technology infrastructure to enable networking between health service providers is essential.

Many consumers would also benefit from greater access to, and use of improved communication technology, to assist and maintain their capacity for independent living.

Aged and community care services are seriously disadvantaged in terms of best practice in care delivery and efficient management due to inadequate access to this technology.

The Alliance is calling for:

- significant funding for sustainable information technology infrastructure and staff training for the aged and community care sectors, including assisted technology to help older people maximise their capacity for independent living and to support their care;
- adequate funding for the electronic enablement of assessment, care, process management and data collection in aged and community care services, encompassing the ACFI assessment and validation process, including medical and pharmacy remote connectivities; and
- an integrated network information system to reduce duplication of assessment procedures and address privacy and shared information issues.

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