

2019 Federal Election Position Statement

Getting aged care right for everyone



April 2019

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The **National Aged Care Alliance** (Alliance) is a representative body of peak national organisations in aged care. The Alliance is a leading and respected advocate for ensuring an effective and sustainable aged care industry driven by the principle of a person's choice and control. The Alliance works collaboratively and by consensus to deliver its vision for senior Australians:

Every older Australian is able to live well, with dignity and independence, as part of their community and in a place of their choosing, with a choice of appropriate and affordable support and care services when they need them.

In taking this vision forward, the Alliance's 2019 Federal election campaign spotlights two critical areas. Both are make-or-break stress points for Australia's ongoing reform of its aged care system.

Australia's population is ageing, community expectations of how life in older age is experienced are increasing, and our aged care system isn't keeping up. Older Australians who require services should have timely access to the appropriate suite of services across aged, acute and sub-acute care. However, the Alliance is concerned that growing numbers of older Australians are being denied the support they need to lead meaningful lives and are having their right to be treated with dignity and respect ignored.

While acknowledging the aged care sector has undergone considerable reform over the past two decades, we need to, can and must do better! The Australian Government owes all older Australians the certainty that supporting their health, wellbeing and quality of life is a high community priority.

The Alliance's 2019 campaign statement builds on the proposals outlined in the Alliance's 2016 *Blueprint II*, which in turn build on the Alliance's earlier *Blueprint for Aged Care Reform* published in 2012. The Alliance's 2019 federal election focuses on two high priority policy domains:

1. Equity of access for all older Australians

All Australians are able to get the care they need, when they need it, regardless of who they are, where they live, their personal preferences and or life circumstances

2. Aged care workforce

Quality jobs and a skilled, right fit workforce equals quality outcomes

These areas must be addressed by Government, older Australians, the wider community and the aged care sector. They must be front and centre of the Government's aged care reform agenda. The current reality, however, is that the aged care system has an insufficient number of home care packages and a workforce that requires support to ensure it has the capacity and capability to respond meaningfully to the diversity of need among older Australians; particularly, those who are most disadvantaged.

The Alliance is calling on all political parties to ensure their policies fully commit the Australian Government to **Getting Aged Care Right For Everyone**.

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (Royal Commission) provides a watershed moment to learn how aged care services and supports are being experienced by older Australians. In addition, the Royal Commission will identify systemic issues including gaps, and how to better ensure the sustainable provision of consumer directed aged care services that allows people to exercise greater choice, control and independence.

While the Royal Commission can be instrumental in guiding future aged care reforms, Government has the responsibility to continue to tackle the known and pressing issues that we need to advance now. Aged care is a nationwide issue – it affects all Australian families now and into the future. There is a well evidenced, indisputable need for increased equity of access to quality focused aged care services. The nation’s political leaders must act now to:

1. elevate aged care as a priority community concern to which a response is needed
2. commit to further investment in the aged care sector to support quality outcomes for older Australians
3. plan and execute reform in a way that enables the system to absorb and execute sustainable and effective change

What the Alliance wants political parties to deliver this election

In the following section the Alliance outlines its key election asks for each of the Alliance’s 2019 Federal Election priority areas.

1. Equity of access

All older Australians are able to get the care they need, when they need it regardless of who they are, where they live, their personal preferences and or life experiences

The Australian population is diverse. This diversity is reflected in the population who uses aged care; a feature that will be heightened over the coming decades.

Australia’s aged care system needs to be adequately resourced to work responsively for all older Australians now and into the future.

Ask 1 ***Increase funding for home care so that all Australians waiting for care receive it when they are assessed as needing it, at the right level to match their needs.***

Why is this important?

The number of people choosing home care has increased by 84 percent over the past decade, while the number of people using residential care has increased by 17 percent. Average occupancy rates have shown a gradual decline¹, although there are still examples of communities, particularly in rural and remote locations, in which residential services are not available to enable people to remain close to their communities when they need full time care. Currently, there are 127,748 older Australians waiting to receive their assessed level of care to remain in their home. This figure includes 73,978 waiting to receive any form of home care package, and 53,770 currently receiving some service at a

¹ Aged Care Financing Authority (2017) Fifth Annual Report on the Funding and Financing of the Aged Care Sector, Canberra

level less than their assessed need. Since the national wait list was introduced in February 2017, the wait list figures have consistently trended upward².

Older Australians waiting for home care is not new. Since the creation of home care services, older Australians seeking services have waited until a provider had a package available, indeed many waited on multiple 'wait lists' in their geographical area. Since February 2017 however, the size of the wait list has been made more transparent³ following the introduction of a national prioritisation system for the assignment of packages to consumers.

The Department of Health has indicated it would cost around \$2 to \$2.5 billion⁴ per annum to provide within 3 months every person on the wait list the funding to cover their assessed level of need, or approximately \$800 million per year to give everyone on the queue a Level 2 package within 3 months of registering on My Aged Care⁵. The Alliance notes that increased Government investment into the Home Care system could ensure older Australians do not have to wait any length of time for the care that Government has assessed them as needing. Delays in receiving care result in accelerated deterioration of health and increased likelihood that an individual will enter residential care prematurely.

The Alliance notes the additional pressure on the Home Care Packages Program and the Commonwealth Home Support Program caused by the dual assessment approaches and the inconsistencies between consumer costs and entitlements under these two programs. This creates disincentives for older Australians to transition between programs⁶. The introduction of a single, streamlined assessment process and an integrated home-based care program would facilitate a better service outcome for older Australians requiring home care.

Ask 2 ***Introduce a consistent, equitable and flexible funding model that supports older Australians to improve their health and wellbeing, regardless of whether care is provided in a home, community or residential care setting.***

Why is this important?

Australia urgently requires an aged care system that is underpinned by adequate funding for care.

Government's aged care expenditure has increased by 21 percent over the past five years⁷ mainly due to an increase in the number of people accessing aged care (about 11 percent) and the increasing complexity of care needs of older people who are accessing aged care services⁸. Australia's aged care sector provides services to 1.3 million people and generates annual revenues totalling \$21.5 billion⁹, representing almost 1 percent of gross domestic product (GDP).

Currently, the scale and proportion of funds contributed towards the cost of care received varies according to the specific program the funds are sourced from. Differences in the consumer

² Home Care Packages Program Data Report 4th Quarter 2018-19; October to December 2018, Department of Health.

³ The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety has highlighted a range of issues that impact the transparency of the home care package data released quarterly by the Department of Health. Royal Aged Care Commission Quote Transcript – Friday 22 March

⁴ Ibid. Fiona Buffinton; Friday 22 March (in response to Dr McEvoy's question regarding the adequacy of Government's investment in home care, Ms Buffinton, First Assistant Secretary in the home care aged care part of the Department responded, "For everybody to get a package within three months, it's probably in the order of an additional two to two and a half billion dollars per annum." p1058

⁵ Ibid. p1057

⁶ National Aged Care Alliance's *Submission in response to the Streamlined Consumer Assessment for Aged Care Discussion Paper – Department of Health, December 2018* (February 2019)

⁷ Australian Government Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Fact Sheet, Government spending on aged care 2016-17.

⁸ GEN Aged Care Data <https://www.gen-agedcaredata.gov.au/Topics/Admissions-into-aged-care> (accessed 18 April 2018)

⁹ Excluding refundable accommodation deposits in residential aged care.

contributions required leads to perverse incentives, for example for older Australians to remain in CHSP rather than transition to a home care package when this becomes more appropriate in terms of maximising their wellbeing. Moreover, it is inequitable that two people with the same financial means will make different levels of consumer contribution when receiving essentially the same services.

Several sources report ¹⁰ residential care as being in a state of deteriorating viability. The combined impacts of regulatory changes and funding pressures having resulted in 42.3 percent of residential facilities reporting an operating loss for the six months to December 2018. The decline in viability for some providers is evident across all geographical locations. However, it is in the outer regional, rural and remote locations where financial concerns are most entrenched, with 60 percent of facilities recording a negative operating result.¹¹

Government service targets project a requirement to create approximately 88,000 residential aged care places over the next decade requiring capital investment in the order of \$54 billion¹². The financial downturn being experienced by many aged care providers challenges the capacity of the aged care sector to achieve the financial stability necessary to maintain - and ultimately expand - the quantity of high quality and safe care services that mirror the diverse needs of older Australians and has a demoralising impact on the aged care workforce.

Current aged care funding models are inflexible. The contemporary paradigm of ageing requires more innovative and flexible funding models built on a rigorous consideration of population and social changes that are underway including: aged care demographics, preferences and demand for service types and mix, workforce skills and availability, increased willingness to embrace technology, expectations of the need to make individual co-contributions. The Alliance supports the development and implementation of an equitable fees, charges and means testing framework across aged care that is based on the level of service received and the capacity of consumers to pay. The co-contribution system needs to be streamlined with a clearly articulated process for ensuring equitable access to all services and programs for those who do not have the capacity to pay¹³.

A challenge for Government will be to find the appropriate balance in meeting the increasing and diverse needs of older Australians who require support, including the more vulnerable segments of the aged population, the declining labour force participation rate with its negative implications for the tax base, and the capacity for people who have the monetary means to make financial contributions to a system committed to equity and quality.

Government must work with the sector to advance the development of a financially sustainable and equitable aged care system that is underpinned by sound financial modelling. To ensure this work is effective, Government needs to consider older Australian's strong preference to receive care at home.

In line with community expectations, government must reimagine aged care so that it extends beyond clinical care to embrace quality of life outcomes and meaningful lives for older people. This includes accessing allied health and pastoral care staff to target wellness, social and emotional supports, social engagement and social inclusion to avoid loneliness, boredom, depression and anxiety.

¹⁰ Aged Care Financing Authority. Short form report Sixth report on the Funding and Financing of the Aged Care Sector. July 2018. Canberra. Stewart Brown. Aged Care Financial Performance Survey. Residential Care Report - March 2018.

¹¹ Ibid, p9

¹² Aged Care Financing Authority, Sixth report on the Funding and Financing of the Aged Care Sector July 2018, pviii

¹³ NACA Submission to the Department of Human Services Discussion Paper – July 2017 Future Reform – an integrated care at home program to support older Australians August 2017

Innovative approaches including an increased investment in a wellness, restorative and reablement approach and activities, social connectedness programs and assistive technologies to accord with best practice models need to have a solid funded place in the aged care sector. These are important as they can assist in proactively delaying or averting a person's need to access higher level services¹⁴. Research commissioned by the National Aged Care Alliance found that for every \$1 invested in assistive technologies \$3 in care costs can be saved¹⁵; savings that could make a significant contribution to securing better outcomes for older Australians and their families. Investments in wellness and reablement, particularly in early intervention, "can significantly reduce or slow the rate of functional decline for older people. In addition to producing short-term benefits for individuals and their families, wellness and reablement is therefore also an effective preventative force: it reduces dependence on longer-term and more costly services"¹⁶.

Ask 3 *Ensure vulnerable older Australians (for example those living in rural or remote locations, older Australians with a disability, those for whom English is a second or subsequent language and those who may have diverse life experiences or characteristics) achieve the same standard of outcomes as other Australians, including through the provision of appropriate subsidies.*

Why is this important?

The population of Australia is diverse¹⁷, and this diversity is a central feature of the population that uses aged care. Older people have told Alliance members that people feel valued when their differences are respected. They affirm that being able to access services that appropriately supports and respects their needs conveys a clear message they can live with dignity and become 'positive risk takers' in a market genuinely driven by individual needs and preferences. This generates higher levels of confidence, increases connectedness and engagement and results in higher levels of satisfaction and positive outcomes.

The Aged Care Act 1997 states no older Australian should find it more difficult than others to access aged care. This notion of equity for all is further strengthened in the *Legislative Review of Aged Care 2017* which concludes that aged care sector policies that support equity of access need to recognise that additional assistance for some groups of people will improve their ability to access care¹⁸.

Equitable access underpins the aged care system's capacity and capability to accommodate and provide for each person's needs, preferences and/or life circumstances. The current Government aged care subsidies and supplements schedule assists in meeting the additional needs of some groups. However, it is clear from the Government's own commissioned reports¹⁹, that many service providers continue to experience varying financial and workforce issues in addressing equity of access. As a result, many older Australians who require aged care and support are missing out.

The commitment to individualised care is not apparent in areas where the market is too thin or absent²⁰. Existing Government subsidies and supplements do not sufficiently recognise the higher

¹⁴ Relates to recommendation 29 of the Legislated Review of Aged Care 2017

¹⁵ National Aged Care Alliance. Assistive Technologies for Australian, June 2018. Melbourne

¹⁶ Nous Group, Wellness and reablement: A summary of consultations across the home care sector, 15 May 2018, commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Health.

¹⁷ National Aged Care Alliance, Equity of Access and Outcomes Statement of Principles, January 2017 available at naca.asn.au

¹⁸ Legislative Review of Aged Care, 2017. Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Health) p168

¹⁹ Australia's Health Ministers' Advisory Council (2017) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework 2017 Report.

²⁰ The CALD Action Plan is one of four distinct action plans developed under the Government's Aged Care Diversity Framework – this plan aims to address the access and other services issues face by this population cohort.

service costs where they occur for certain groups/individuals; for example, people who are financially disadvantaged may experience reduced service choice. Also, older Australians in rural and remote areas face increased challenges; including the passing on of provider costs due to small scale, with workforce costs and remoteness also impacting on the costs of goods and services. Other population cohorts who also too often face challenges in accessing aged care services include more recently arrived population groups, people who speak a language other than English²¹, LGBTI people and people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Groups not currently identified in the *Aged Care Act* as a “special needs” group, but who face specific issues in accessing aged care, include people living with cognitive impairment including dementia, people with a disability and people with mental health challenges or mental ill health. These groups can experience extra barriers engaging with or accessing the aged care sector as well as receiving the appropriate type of care they need. Importantly, while these groups may not yet be recognised under the *Aged Care Act* they have been recognised by the Aged Care Sector Committee’s Aged Care Diversity Framework²².

Additional funding is required to ensure equity of access and outcomes across different older populations. Adequate subsidies/supplements are required to ensure people who experience financial hardship, social disadvantage, homelessness, risk of homelessness, insecure housing, and those with specific cultural needs are supported to access and receive the services that are appropriate and meaningful to them. Government subsidies need to recognise that the provision of some services cost more to specific population groups due to individual need or circumstances. For example: travel for workers in rural/remote areas; interpreters/translation services for people who speak a language other than English; culturally safe workforce for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and support for health and clinical needs – oxygen, medication and wound care.

Government funding remains a key ingredient in the aged care sector’s capacity to provide equity of access and outcomes for all older Australians. Without a more concentrated and targeted financial and policy effort by Government, the most vulnerable Australians – along with their carers, families, friends and communities - will continue to be marginalised with their health and wellbeing outcomes trailing behind those of their mainstream contemporaries.

Ask 4 ***Simplify the aged care system so it is easier for people to understand and access and provide more help to people who need assistance to navigate the system.***

Why is this important?

With the principle of individual choice and control at the core of the aged care system, ensuring older Australians and their families are able to make informed choices is critical. The mandated publication of aged care services’ prices and consumer experience reports by mid-2019 is greatly applauded and widely supported.

The introduction of My Aged Care in 2012 has proved to be a useful tool for people who have adequate internet skills, are proficient in English and have solid health and service system literacy. However, Department of Health research²³ has identified that many Australians share concerns about

²¹ Given Australia’s increasing population diversity, which is predicted to continue over the coming decades, the proportion of older persons from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities accessing aged care is slowly rising.

²² Aged Care Sector Committee Diversity Sub Group, December 2017 ‘Aged Care Diversity Framework’, Canberra, p4

²³ September and October 2016 Discovery Workshops

My Aged Care. Significant numbers of Australians, many of them among the most vulnerable and or disadvantaged population members, report that they find My Aged Care baffling²⁴.

Different and more tailored opportunities and supports – for example, outreach services –are required to enable older Australians who face barriers and require additional support to access information and services. Supports are required throughout the My Aged Care system, from registration through assessment and to service delivery.

The Aged Care System Navigators Trial commenced in February 2019. A major step forward would be a commitment by Government to roll out models evaluated as successful. The Alliance supports a full program of Navigators across the country so that all vulnerable and or disadvantaged people needing to access aged care are supported to understand and access the aged care system.

The commencement of the National Home Care Prioritisation in 2017 has provided a more transparent picture of demand and allows for a fairer allocation of packages to older Australians. However, the Alliance notes the continued lack of visibility of people who are waiting for CHSP services. This program continues to require consumers to search and register with multiple providers while waiting for services to become available. The Alliance believes the inclusion of CHSP within a single, transparent allocation and availability system would facilitate an effective quality aged care system.

2. Aged Care Workforce

Aged care workers need safe environments and appropriate remuneration to support them in providing high quality care. Quality jobs equals quality care.

Older Australians have the right to a high quality aged care system that delivers timely, safe, inclusive and appropriate care and support to everyone who needs it, enables older people to live meaningful lives and delivers equitable quality outcomes.

Aged care workers also have a right to work in an environment that is safe and enables them to provide the quality outcomes older Australians want and deserve. To do this, workers need to know their role is valued. They need to work in an environment with the right number of staff who have the right skills and qualifications to meet the needs of people receiving services.

All staff need to have the training and professional development to address the increasing complexity of individual needs, preferences and expectations. Staff must be supported to have the confidence and skill to incorporate evidence-based wellbeing and social inclusion approaches and assistive technologies.

Reforms in aged care are predicated on having sufficient right fit workers with the appropriate values, education, skills, experience and ongoing training to deliver an increasingly complex and changing range of quality aged care services. A greater emphasis on successful workforce planning, training and development and a more positive industry image will reduce staff turnover and retain employees, especially those with the necessary skills, expertise and personal attributes to deliver high-quality aged care services. Ongoing Government support for the implementation of a pragmatic approach to

²⁴ My Aged Care Evaluations: Stage Two Wave 2. Summary of Findings – Final August 2017
https://agedcare.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/09_2017/amr_myagedcare_stage2_wave2_summary_of_findings.pdf
(accessed 23 April 2019)

addressing the issues affecting the aged care workforce will facilitate the longer-term viability of the sector.

Ask 5 ***Government policies and funding should deliver more staff and an appropriate skill mix that delivers quality outcomes for older Australians.***

Why is this important?

Aged care service provision is a growth industry. The Productivity Commission Report²⁵ forecasts that 3.5 million Australians will be accessing aged care services every year by 2050, requiring a workforce of almost one million direct care workers. The sector is already struggling to attract and retain an adequately skilled workforce in an increasingly competitive market, particularly in regional and remote areas of Australia.

The aged care industry needs to attract right fit individuals who can be supported on the appropriate developmental paths to enter aged care as a career choice. Firstly, this starts with a shift in mindset, where work in aged care is seen as a valuable, rewarding and fulfilling career choice. To support this change, the Alliance encourages Government to invest in the structural change required to create a workforce with more robust positions rather than casual jobs; real career paths, better-on-the-job training and qualifications and much better pay, especially for personal carers, nurses, middle management and allied health professionals.

Australia's Aged Care Workforce Strategy, outlined in the *A Matter of Care (2018)*²⁶, presents an account of the workforce challenges facing the aged care sector currently and, if not promptly addressed, into the future. Chief among these is the lack of resources to expand current staff levels and/or diversify a service's existing skill mix to more closely complement current individual care and support needs and preferences.

At the same time as the sector is attempting to bed down systemic reform and meet the increasing demand for care and support, a decline in the availability of the informal workforce is adding further pressure to the paid direct care workforce. This is further exacerbated by the increased competition for workers across aged care, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and the community sector. Now is the time for concerted action on the number and skill mix of the aged care workforce.

An aged care system which is responsive to the needs of a diverse older population, many with complex care and support needs, requires a workforce capable of providing inclusive and appropriate care and support within practice approaches which maximise choice and control for older Australians. Government will need to take a major role in coordinating the actions required to deliver to older Australians more workers and ensure an appropriate skill mix that delivers quality, consumer outcomes. Resourcing the implementation of the recommendations of the Aged Care Workforce Strategy Taskforce is a vital step in realising the massive change required. Workforce issues must be effectively and sustainably addressed within the context of the transformational change underway across the aged care sector.

²⁵ Productivity Commission 2011, *Caring for Older Australians: Overview, Report No. 53, Final Inquiry Report*, Canberra.

Ask 6 ***Ensure improved and ongoing training appropriate to the skills staff need to fulfil their job.***

Why is this important?

The care of older people offers interesting and rewarding career opportunities. However, the current aged care workforce is facing significant issues, including appropriate up-to-date workforce education and training. The Alliance believes the industry and key stakeholders need to be appropriately resourced to drive quality training and education outcomes.

A major education and training barrier that must be addressed is the lack of attention to contemporary aged care knowledge and evidence-based care and management practices within undergraduate and specialised aged care training programs across many health professions²⁷. In *A Matter of Care (2018)*²⁸, the aged care workforce's current education and training, skills and qualification framework are assessed as not aligning with the nature of the work, relationships with people receiving care and leadership roles now expected in the aged care industry. The report also lists²⁹ a range of workforce competencies, particularly for personal care workers that require strengthening. These range from basic care skills to enhanced supervision.

A Matter of Care also highlights a fact well known by the aged care workforce. Increasing longevity means that many older people enter residential aged care with multiple chronic conditions, and by the time they require residential care tend to have very complex health and care needs. In parallel, the prevalence of dementia is increasing with 52 percent of people accessing residential care living with dementia. The increasing complexity of need means many accessing services can only have their needs met through a coordinated engagement of multidisciplinary services from across aged, health and disability. If Government is serious about providing older Australians safe and quality individually focused aged care services, then it must commit to the further development of the Aged Care Workforce Strategy Taskforce's findings.

Ask 7 ***Invest in staff with the right values to retain a quality workforce.***

Why is this important?

The Review of National Aged Care Quality Regulatory Processes (2017) identifies "Professionalism of aged care workers, a commitment to care and compassion, and effective clinical governance in the residential homes in which they work, are critical to ensuring that residents are well cared for"³⁰. The *A Matter of Care Report* advises that "every business and or industry must have a clear sense of purpose so that those within the organisation, and those interacting from outside, want to belong"³¹. The current phase of aged care reform is a critical time for the sector to understand and articulate the values that it commits to and which need to be demonstrated through its immediate and interfacing workforces. As stated within the report, it is time to uncover the "fundamental truths driving the industry"³².

²⁷ A Matter of Care Australia's Aged Care Workforce Strategy, Aged Care Workforce Strategy Taskforce, June 2018. p5

²⁸ Ibid pv

²⁹ Ibid p26

³⁰ Kate Carnell AO and Professor Ron Patterson ONZM, Review of National Aged Care Quality Regulatory Process, Australian Government Department of Health 2017

³¹ A Matter of Care. Australia's Aged Care Workforce Strategy, Aged Care Workforce Strategy Taskforce, June 2018 p10

³² Ibid p13

Staff is the reported most common response older Australians and their family and friend carers give when asked about what ‘safety and quality’ means to them in aged care.³³ In particular ‘Being treated with respect and dignity’ (98.7%) and ‘Staff friendliness’ (98.1%) were two of the most important quality of life metrics for consumers in determining their preferred aged care provider.³⁴ A critical element of investing in the aged care workforce is supporting the recruitment and training of staff who possess values needed to work respectfully with all older Australians, especially those who are part of special needs or diversity groups. The Aged Care Workforce Strategy Taskforce proposes that one starting point to reframing attitudes towards older people is a societal campaign to promote the value of the aged care workforce and reframe society’s attitudes towards care, ageing and dying³⁵.

The Alliance believes that ensuring an effective and engaged aged care workforce with the appropriate skill mix is critical to ensuring better access to safe and quality care for all Australians. The Aged Care Workforce Strategy advises, “we need to build trust in our aged-care workforce by improving education and training. We also need a shift in attitude, with the industry taking the lead and showing the community what good care looks like³⁶. The government and community need to give our aged-care workforce the support and funding it needs so it can support us”³⁷.

Ask 8 *Expand in-reach health services so that aged care residents have access to health services such as specialist care and mental health services, allied health, general practitioner and dental health services.*

Why is this important?

The aged care sector is not intended as or funded to provide a standalone health service. Aged care consumers have the right to access health services in the same way as any Australian. Increasingly older Australians accessing aged care, especially those with complex needs, require timely access to health services and specialist health practitioners³⁸ - including palliative care nurse practitioners, geriatricians, mental health specialists, general practitioners, dentists and allied health professionals. The engagement of such a suite of professional knowledge and practice when needed is critical in supporting the individual to live well³⁹. However, at best, older Australians their families and providers report that they find the current interfaces across various health services as too inflexible and do not provide timely access to such services. New underpinning structures (inclusive of training and educational institutions) are required to facilitate and strengthen coordination across the various sectors to ensure each person receiving aged care is surrounded by the optimal care and support team. The Alliance believes a key aged care reform focus needs to be on building sector-wide capabilities to innovate and extend new ways of working collaboratively to meet the needs, preferences and expectations of the older people who use aged care services.

The Aged Care Workforce Strategy Taskforce, as part of it framing the case for workforce change, has made several recommendations that target strengthening the interface between aged care and

³³ COTA Australia (February 2018) ‘Measuring Quality and Consumer Choice in Aged Care’, Canberra p19

³⁴ Ibid. p22

³⁵ A Matter of Care Australia’s Aged Care Workforce Strategy, Aged Care Workforce Strategy Taskforce, June 2018. p18

³⁶ This could take the form of revisiting what actual practices support quality and safe care. Such a framework would in turn provide guidance and confidence for the aged care workforce.

³⁷ <https://agedcare.health.gov.au/reform/aged-care-workforce-strategy-taskforce-editorials> accessed 26 March 2019

³⁸ Ibid, p 68

³⁹ The concept of living well is more than just safety and the provision of essential food, hydration and activity opportunities. It includes the individual’s physical, emotional, cultural (environment and identity) and spiritual aspects. All are inter-related and important. The concept is founded on trust and respect between the individual receiving care and those supporting them with care. It requires the creation of a cohesive environment that supports individuals to optimise their choices and improve quality of life.

primary and acute care – so as to bolster the accessibility of these services within and across aged care services, especially older Australians experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage. The importance of supporting the in-reach health services into aged care facilities is further reinforced by the new Aged Care Quality Standards⁴⁰ and especially the Guidance and Resources for Providers to support the Aged Care Quality Standards, which highlight the measures aged care providers are expected to meet the new Standards in terms of workforce change and, in particular, increased access to health practitioners and a variety of health services appropriate to individuals' needs.

Change needs to happen simultaneously within and cross the various health and social assistance sectors and within workforce training and undergraduate programs. As the Taskforce advises, what better aged care looks like needs to be understood as a direct result of building the capacity for enhanced integration of services across relevant sectors, coupled with a strengthened focus on preventive care, wellness and reablement. Government, in collaboration with key stakeholders – including state health systems – must invest in establishing and regulating the policy and financial drivers that support and maintain an integrated care and assistance system that enables people, including older Australians, to get the care they want and deserve, when and where they need it. As the Alliance advocates, Government needs to build on the momentum to date if Australia is to have an aged care system that interfaces smoothly with other sectors so that the needs of older Australians and their families are meaningfully and effectively responded to now, and in the future as our aged population continues to grow.

⁴⁰ Aged Care Quality Standards <https://agedcare-care-quality-standards> (accessed 29 April 2019)

NACA

The National Aged Care Alliance is the representative body of peak national organisations in aged care including consumer groups, providers, unions and professionals.

