

**national
AGED CARE alliance**

HISTORY OF THE ALLIANCE

April 2000 to July 2019

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Introduction

The National Aged Care Alliance (the Alliance) is a representative body of peak national organisations committed to reforming aged care to better support and care for older people. It comprises representatives of aged care providers, consumer groups, unions and health professionals working together to determine a more positive future for older people and aged care in Australia.

The Alliance was formed in 2000 to address compelling issues in the aged care sector. It was the first time the entire sector was able to be represented in one body. It is still unique in representing all aspects of the aged care sector to government through one voice.

The Alliance vision, first endorsed and published in 2009, was updated in 2015 and remains current as the basis of Alliance work.

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. (NACA Blueprint II, June 2015)

History of the National Aged Care Alliance

In February 2000, national media and political attention on quality-of-care in the residential aged care sector raised concerns among stakeholders across the industry and these became the impetus for action. In March 2000, key representatives of the Australian Nursing Federation, Catholic Health Australia, and Uniting Care Australia met informally, very concerned that the current public criticisms and their differing advocacy and lobbying approaches at the last Federal election were continuing to enable the Government to 'divide' the sector without the government having to address key issues. This lack of sector unity was clearly not leading to improved care and support services for older people. These three organisations considered these matters so important to the wellbeing of older people throughout Australia they invited Aged and Community Services Australia to join with them to sponsor a sector-wide meeting of all key stakeholders to discuss issues of common concern and ways of enhancing quality outcomes for older people in receipt of aged care services.

The first Aged Care Issues Forum was organised by the Australian Nursing Federation and held in Sydney over one and a half days on 17 – 18 April 2000, with an external independent facilitator, Les Stahl, facilitating the meeting. Seventeen organisations attended this meeting:

- Aged and Community Services Australia
- Alzheimer's Australia (now Dementia Australia)
- Anglicare Australia
- Australian Liquor and Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers' Union (now United Voice)
- Australian Medical Association
- Australian Nursing Federation (now Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation)
- Australian Nursing Homes and Extended Care Association (now Leading Age Services Australia)
- Australian Pensioners and Superannuants Federation
- Baptist Care Australia
- Carers Association of Australia (now Carers Australia)
- Catholic Health Australia
- Council on the Ageing Australia (now COTA Australia)
- Geriaction
- Health Services Union of Australia
- National Seniors Association

- Royal College of Nursing Australia
- UnitingCare Australia

It was unprecedented at that time for consumers, providers, unions and professional organisations (now referred to as member constituencies) to commit to collaborating and working together on the breadth of the aged care sector and emerging and ongoing issues.

The first meeting identified four broad issues as being shared priorities for the focus of a united policy agenda. Interestingly, the issues defined at that first meeting have formed the core of the Alliance's agenda and activities in subsequent years. These items were:

- consumer rights
- quality of care
- workforce planning
- short and long term financing of aged care

Four working groups were formed to progress these broad areas. These were:

- quality benchmark of care
- staffing levels and skills mix
- complaints and accreditation
- funding

A media statement following the first meeting stated that “the Forum was held to discuss the current state of the industry and develop strategies to move beyond the current concerns over quality of care in aged care facilities. As aged care facilities only exist to provide care for residents, the Forum agreed that consumer representatives must have a strong role in the progression of the issues.”

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation offered to provide the initial secretarial function at no cost to member organisations. The founding four organisations formed the initial ‘Sponsors group’ responsible for developing the meeting agendas, following up on activities between meetings, covering out of pocket costs of meetings and underwriting any initial research costs incurred. It was agreed that the Forum would reconvene in July 2000.

The second meeting of the Aged Care Issues Forum was held in Melbourne on the 27th & 28th July 2000 with 18 national organisations as members. The meeting unanimously agreed to advance aged care issues through a formal alliance and so the National Aged Care Alliance (the Alliance) came into being. The new Alliance aimed to identify areas of common ground and consensus in addressing the issues of relevance to aged care service delivery in Australia. The Alliance sought to work collaboratively towards a united agenda for the aged care sector with a commitment to being inclusive of all national aged care peak stakeholders. It was also agreed that the Alliance not become an incorporated body, nor have elected office bearers. The four identified priority focus areas were progressed, member interaction rules were agreed and the Australian Nursing Homes & Extended Care Association (now Leading Age Services Australia) joined the four founding members as a sponsoring organisation.

A third meeting (now the National Aged Care Alliance) was held in November 2000 with sector-wide issues continuing to be progressed. Terms of Reference to formalise membership criteria and explain how the Alliance works together and achieves consensus positions were also endorsed and the NACA Interaction Rules were formalised.

The current Terms of Reference are available on the Alliance website www.naca.asn.au. They include detail of how the Alliance operates, the membership list at the current date and the Interaction Rules.

Since its inception in 2000, the Alliance has strengthened its collaborative work and grown, with current membership of 54 national peak organisations. All Alliance publications can be found at www.naca.asn.au.

Special acknowledgement goes to those who had the initial vision – Jill Iliffe (ANMF), Richard Gray (Catholic Health Australia), Libby Davies (Uniting Care Australia) and Maureen Lyster (Aged and Community Services Australia) – and to Les Stahl of Facilitation Plus Australia Pty Ltd as the specialist facilitator who has effectively guided every meeting of the Alliance.

Achievements and Highlights

The Alliance has changed considerably since it formed in 2000, maturing from a group of people sharing some of their concerns to an effective mechanism for open sharing of information and sector intelligence, and discussion of sensitive issues resulting in advocacy for future reform. This collaborative approach has resulted in the Alliance vision and leadership for sector reform.

The vision, first endorsed by the Alliance in August 2009, was based on a strong consensus that aged care reform was long overdue. The vision was influential in shaping the approach that the Productivity Commission took to their inquiry ‘Caring for Older Australians’. As noted earlier, the vision was updated in the Blueprint II of 2015:

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

Alliance achievements and highlights in its first 12 years include the following.

- The Alliance has held a number of aged care summits and meetings. For example, in February 2004 the Alliance held an aged care summit at the AMA to discuss health and aged care issues. Events of this kind have been helpful to lift the profile of aged care as an issue and to show the work of the Alliance.
- The Alliance meets with Ministers, Shadow Ministers and representatives from relevant government agencies to ensure key stakeholders are informed of the processes in place for policy and program development as well as for sharing views.
- Over the years the Alliance has been used to discuss complex issues to identify common ground. Since 2005 the issue of choice and what it might mean in aged care has been a live issue for debate. These discussions helped inform a wider group of people about what might be involved in consumer directed care and the different forms it could take from budget holding to direct payment of cash to consumers.
- The Alliance has held Parliamentary breakfasts to urge a higher priority for aged care reform. The Alliance was assured in May 2009 that aged care would become a priority in the second term of the Labor Government.
- The Alliance has supported organisations early in their development, for example, the Alliance assisted Alzheimer’s Australia (now Dementia Australia) to develop their advocacy and achieve the Dementia Initiative in 2005.
- The Alliance has commissioned work to support an evidence base for the reform of aged care. For example, the report by Jan Webster commissioned by the National Aged Care Alliance on “Options for Financing Long-Term Care” (Webster 2002) and a discussion paper on aged care

reform prepared for the National Aged Care Alliance by Warwick Bruen, Policy Adviser, Alzheimer's Australia.

- The Alliance has held meetings with experts to discuss issues of importance in aged care including complaints mechanisms, eHealth and palliative care.
- The Alliance has generated a number of discussion and position papers on key reform topics. These are available on the Alliance website: www.naca.asn.au.

The collaborative activities of the Alliance were taken to a new level with the publication of the Productivity Commission's final report *Caring for Older Australians* (August 2011). With the agreement of the then Minister, the Alliance formed working groups to consider and report on key groups of recommendations in the Report.

The subsequent commitment of the Gillard Government to the Living Longer. Living Better. package of aged care reforms in April 2012 was welcomed by the Alliance to ensure bipartisan support for the package and the opportunity for reform was not lost.

The Alliance received funding from government (through a contract with COTA Australia in 2012 and committed through to 2020) to form the Aged Care Reform Team which leads, supports and enables the implementation of advisory groups that work with the Department of Health on a range of issues. This has established a strong foundation for the building blocks of the ongoing reform of Australia's aged care system.

The Work of the Alliance

The Alliance provides an opportunity to share information and learning across an extremely complex sector. Organisations in each of the four constituencies liaise and collaborate in the work of aged care service development and delivery. This liaison across each constituency is also evident within the internal functioning of the Alliance through formal and informal meetings. Members participate in working groups and special interest groups that match their interests and which prepare position papers and discussion papers on matters of interest to the Alliance.

Constituency groups also come together to influence and advocate on specific issues. The aged care reform advisory groups, joint initiatives between the Alliance and the Department of Health, provide information, and develop and advocate for particular positions on behalf of the sector to the Department and government on the implementation of ongoing and proposed reforms.

Advocating and engaging

The Alliance provides a single powerful and non-partisan voice on behalf of the aged care sector while still recognising the independence of individual members and constituencies. Its key stakeholders are the members of both Houses of Parliament, the relevant government departments and other sectors whose interests interlink or interface with those of aged care. By making its work public, the Alliance also engages with all Australians interested in the development and delivery of aged care services.

Member organisations in each of the constituencies will, either individually or as a cohort, engage with these same stakeholders on issues affecting aspects of the delivery and development of aged care services of specific interest to them.

The role of consensus

In general, the Alliance aims for a consensus view and will only provide advice or act when all members feel they can support the position. The Alliance's most influential papers [Leading the Way: Our Vision for Support and Care of Older Australians (2009), Blueprint for Aged Care Reform (2012) and Blueprint Series II (2015)], were developed as consensus positions.

The Alliance recognises that, given the diversity of its membership, there are times when consensus is difficult to achieve. In these instances, and where a significant majority of members want to move forward, there is a mechanism where members who need to do so can choose not to endorse an Alliance position or paper. This is recorded and acknowledged.

On other occasions the Alliance may decide it will take no official position on a particular issue or development, leaving all comment and advocacy to individual members and constituent groups.

