

Statement: Immediate Priorities for Aged Care Reform

About the Alliance

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 represented by one body. The Alliance is still unique in representing the aged care sector to Government through one voice.

The Alliance vision, first endorsed and published in 2009, was updated in 2015 and remains 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.”

Commitment from Government to undertake fundamental reform

The recommendations of the Final Report of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety place principal responsibility on the Australian Government to transform the aged care industry and system, both structurally and culturally. The aim is to ensure a dedicated sector wide focus on delivering demonstrated, high quality, service outcomes that enhance the lives of older Australians. This will need to include investment, policy change and an implementation plan with clear timelines to provide confidence and certainty for the Australian community and the aged care sector.

It is expected that the Australian Government will commit to the Royal Commission’s recommendations and policy objectives and implement the bulk of reform over the next four years. Any differences in approach by the two Commissioners must not be used to delay needed reform.

There is consensus within the Alliance on the key principles and short and medium actions to deliver reform.

Key areas of consensus (not in order of priority) include:

- a human rights-based policy and practice
- continuous quality improvement and evidenced based practice
- equitable access and high quality service outcomes for all older Australians including diverse and marginalised populations
- ongoing planning and commitment to improve the capacity and capability of the workforce, transparency and accountability of service performance
- raising the standard of clinical governance

The Alliance has agreed on the following actions for immediate and urgent action by the Australian Government.

Clear the Home Care Package Waiting List and establish the new Care at Home Program

The Royal Commission has substantiated the preference of older Australians for the provision of care at home. The Alliance recognises and unequivocally supports this direction and calls for:

- Funding for additional home care packages and commitment to clear the waitlist at levels commensurate to recipient need by December 2022 at the latest
- An action plan to secure the necessary qualified and skilled workforce to deliver care.
- Commitment to establishing the new Care at Home Program by 2024 at the latest

As an interim measure:

- Immediate growth funding for the Commonwealth Home Support Program. This is critical to address needs prior to the creation of a new Care at Home Program

Establish an Implementation Taskforce to commence implementing the Royal Commission's recommendations including the drafting of a new Aged Care Act and publish and commit to a timetable for reform implementation

The Alliance agrees reform work must commence immediately. We are calling for the establishment of a dedicated implementation taskforce, with clear terms of reference, to drive the implementation of the Royal Commission's recommendations. The taskforce would have an independent chair and independent members, together with the relevant Deputy Secretaries, as recommended by Commissioner Briggs, and include people with a lived experience of aged care and representatives of all key workforces and a demonstrated commitment to implementing aged care reform that complements and addresses the lessons learnt during the Royal Commission.

We are also calling for the publication of a full implementation timetable of key reform recommendations. The Alliance believes it is essential that all aged care stakeholders, including the Australian public are kept informed of the progress of the reform agenda and empowered to hold the Australian Government accountable to fulfilling its commitment to older Australians using aged care.

Establish key bodies for System Governance

The Royal Commission recommended different ways the system could be governed. There were some common elements across the proposed models that the Alliance supports that would provide greater transparency and these include:

- The establishment of a Council of Elders with membership of such a Council to include proportionate representation of diverse voices with current lived experience of aged care
- The establishment of an independent pricing authority as recommended by the Commissioners
- The immediate establishment of an independent Inspector-General for Aged Care to investigate, monitor and report on the administration and governance of the aged care system
- The establishment of an independent standards setting body

The Inspector-General would be formally established under the new Act. The Inspector-General should have its own budget staffing and be separate from the governance body for the aged care system. However, the Alliance believes it would be pragmatic to have the position established before other governance arrangements are established. This would ensure public reporting to

Parliament on governance, pricing, and regulator performance during (and beyond) the transition period.

Commit to an agreement to increase aged care sector wages

Many recommendations from the Royal Commission are predicated on having sufficient workers with the appropriate qualifications, skills, and experience to deliver an increasingly complex and changing range of quality aged care services at home and in residential care settings.

Fundamental to attracting and retaining the workforce is ensuring increases in worker remuneration.

We are calling for Government to commit to a tripartite agreement (government, unions, and providers) including an approach for uplift of the salaries of aged care sector workers. The agreement would include provision for funding based on the value of work in the sector, a process for determining a framework for modernised job classification and workforce design arrangements and an immediate reviewing of training and qualification arrangements and funding/incentives.

Commit to and invest in a co-design process with older Australians, their informal carers and the sector to inform the development of the new aged care program

The Alliance acknowledges it is imperative older Australians and the aged care sector are key stakeholders in the design and development of a new aged care program. The Alliance fully supports the Royal Commission's highlighting of the need for the aged care system to place greater weight on the perspectives of older people with lived experiences of receiving aged care services.

The Alliance argues it is essential that the new aged care program is underpinned and guided continuously by the diversity of voices that make up the aged care consumer and the workforce populations. Their voices, as well as those of other key stakeholder groups, will ensure the reform program is able to be achieved and sustained.

We call on the Government to commit to a collaborative process focused on the principles of inclusive stakeholder co-design to inform, guide and review the implementation of a new aged care program. This process, to be effective, must attribute a premium to the voices, experiences and life circumstances of people who use and work within aged care.

Set a minimum quality and safety standard for staff time in residential aged care

We are calling for the establishment of a minimum quality and safety standard for staff time in residential aged care. In line with the Commissioners' recommendation, we assert, this needs to include an appropriate skill mix and daily minimum staff time. We also agree the skill mix must be inclusive of registered nurses, enrolled nurses, personal care workers, allied health professionals and lifestyle support, with at least one registered nurse on site at all times. The introduction of a quality and safety standard for staff time in residential aged care needs to be underpinned by a clear established evidence base and rationale.

The Alliance advocates strongly that this proposed standard be publicly and transparently reported.

Establish a workforce education and training fund to improve care quality

The Royal Commission established that for care outcomes for older Australians to improve there must be a dedicated commitment by Government to consistent education and training for the workforce. Beyond minimum qualification requirements, the Commissioners contend aged care workers need regular updating and expanding of skills to deliver quality care and be part of a sector wide culture that unambiguously and strenuously supports and promotes this.

The Alliance supports the establishment of a dedicated workforce education and training fund to support improvements in the skills and qualification base of the aged care sector. However, to ensure the funds are appropriately expended, we argue it must have clear goals and objectives and a range of resource allocation and reporting mechanisms. The fund would need to be part of a more substantive workforce planning strategy and include a strong purposeful partnership with the education and training sector.

Provide immediate funding increases to ensure care needs are met

We call for increased transparent funding, over the forward estimates, to commence no later than 1 July 2021 to:

- Fund the \$10 increase in daily care fee targeting food and nutrition
- Continue the viability supplement targeting rural and remote services and homelessness service providers
- Amend residential aged care indexation arrangements to enable care subsidies and viability supplements to be increased
- Amend and create new items in the Medicare Benefits Schedule to improve access to all health practitioner services

This change in funding must be transparent, accountable and its use publicly reported.

Commitment to funding the delivery of culturally safe and trauma informed care and services to diverse and marginalised groups

The Royal Commission recognised and acknowledged the importance of meeting the needs of diverse and marginalised groups in a general sense and supports the aims of the Diversity Framework. Specific recommendations are made for some groups with limited or no reference to others. The Alliance supports and recognises the importance of meeting the needs of all diverse and marginalised older people to achieve equitable outcomes. We call for:

- Developing and delivering on the remaining Action Plans from the Diversity Framework and the independent standard setter investigating and considering making all Action Plans mandatory
- Continuing a diversity body/group/advisory at a national level to drive diversity as core business, including advising on the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission. The bodies set up for implementation or as governance entities must have members with appropriate expertise and skills to advise on diversity, equity and inclusion
- The continuation of the NAGATSIAC to ensure the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are guiding the reforms
- Appropriate and inclusive data collection on diverse and vulnerable groups throughout their aged care journey and ensuring the ABS Standard for Sex, Gender, Variation of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables, 2020 is implemented as part of the data collection process

Commitment to transparent and rigorous performance indicators to support consumer choice and quality improvement

The Commissioners recommend new requirements for the collection and publication of system and risk adjusted service level quality indicators, a requirement to cooperate with the pricing authority's investigations, a requirement to disclose staff hours, standardised statements of care for home care and more stringent financial reporting.

Better performance indicators will be vital to empowering older people to choose the provider that best meets their needs, ensuring providers can benchmark their performance to improve, and enabling the public to hold Government accountable for changes in overall system performance.

Whatever indicators are used must be based on rigorous research, and carefully risk adjusted to ensure like for like comparisons.