

The National Report

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Aged & Community Services Australia



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National Aged Care Alliance Calls for Fundamental Reform

Fundamental reforms are needed to put the interests of the elderly at the heart of Australia's aged care system, says the National Aged Care Alliance (NACA), of which ACSA is a member. If older Australians are to live independently with dignity, changes are essential to give them the same freedoms and choices as other Australians.

"The current system has evolved over the years into a model where older people requiring services are effectively placed into pre-determined menus," NACA spokesman Ian Yates said.

"This often does not reflect the preferences, aspirations or personal circumstances of the person receiving the care.

"We need to move to a system where individuals can have access in their own homes to the support or care they need and the right to make decisions for themselves in conjunction with chosen family and friends where appropriate.

"This will require funding for care and support to be linked to each recipient rather than the service providers and separated from accommodation funding."

"The Alliance believes that users should contribute to the costs of support and care services and these costs should be nationally consistent, transparent, equitable and affordable," Mr Yates said. "But no one should be denied access to support and care because of financial incapacity."

Pat Sparrow ACSA's Policy Manager said there was a national shortage of aged care facilities and that the amount of care provided to people in their own homes had also dropped.

"The levels of care that are being provided to people at home in recent years have dropped...from seven hours a week to four hours a week," she said.

"It makes it much harder for people to stay at home and means they are not necessarily getting the amount of support that would best enable them to live their lives. "It makes it harder for family carers who are supporting them as well."

Nurses Not the Only Workers: Phase Two of ANF-University of Melbourne Study

Media reports of an ANF funded University of Melbourne study claimed that staff workloads in aged care have increased significantly in Victoria over the past two years, with some nurses looking after 47 elderly people at a time at nursing homes, compared to 39 in 2007. However the study actually measured only nurses' work rather than all staff workloads and does not demonstrate anything about overall staff workloads

The survey had 541 respondents, mainly registered nurses. The survey reported increased levels of aggression from nurses towards residents and vice versa :2007, 3.6 per cent of participants said they had witnessed a co-worker being aggressive towards a resident at least once in the previous six months, compared to 7.3 per cent this year.

The study also found an improvement in the social functioning of residents, an increased responsiveness to resident needs and an increased emphasis on resident safety. These findings went unreported to the media.

"Participants also reported that the more residents each registered nurse had to care for, the less satisfied they were with their facility, and the lower resident safety and care at their facility was," the authors, Associate Professor Leisa Sargent, Professor Bill Harley and Dr Belinda Allen, from the Economics and Commerce faculty wrote.

The ANF has used the report to argue for more pay for aged care nurses and for minimum staff: resident ratios.

ACSA Comment

The care and support of Australia's elderly will be improved only when funding is increased. ACSA CEO Greg Mundy said.

Competitive wages for all staff working in aged care is the ideal but right now and in the foreseeable future it is fanciful without assurances of increased government funding.

The ANF's call for nurse-resident ratios in aged care facilities is also an impossible goal and one not suited to the flexibility required to meet residents' needs.

Even if funding was increased to more properly compensate staff, there still aren't enough nurses available to meet the ratios being demanded by the ANF. Setting these sorts of targets when there is an international shortage of nurses is setting the system up to fail. What we can do, and what we need to ensure, is an appropriate mix of staff to meet the varied needs of residents, he said.

Greg also expressed concerns too about the way the results of this commissioned research were reported. People rightly assume that university research is objective and not subject to "cash for comment". However, media reports of the research was highly selective and misleading.

Minister Elliott would not comment on ratios, but in a media release on the issue she urged "Anyone with concerns about the care or welfare of residents should immediately contact the Department of Health and Ageing's Complaints Investigation Scheme."

ACFI a Failure Says iCare Mini Poll

The Aged Care Funding Instrument [ACFI] has failed to secure the future of residential care, according to a poll of just over 100 providers conducted by clinical software company, iCare.

When asked if the new funding tool had ensured the sector's viability, 72.3 per cent of respondents said no; 3.2 per cent of survey participants said yes, while 2.1 per cent said it had improved the situation for high care residents but not for low care.

The survey found that the ACFI has led to more accurate care information, and online ACFI claiming is a success; over three quarters of providers are now submitting their ACFI claims over the web and 78.1 per cent said online claiming had improved their access to data for key business and care decisions.

However less than half of the respondents felt that the ACFI had reduced documentation. Anecdotal feedback from providers showed that validators are requesting hard copies of all documentation, even when they have been completed using a computer system.

ACSA Comment

ACSA is represented on a departmental working party looking at a completely electronic approach to validation which is identifying the barriers to such an approach and developing solutions to them. This work has only recently commenced.

First HACC Program Annual Report

Minister Elliot on 23 November released the first ever (national) annual HACC Program report that showed more than 830,000 people across Australia received HACC services and eight million hours of domestic assistance were provided during 2007-08.

Key HACC facts reported included:

- 835,269 people accessed HACC Program services;
- Services were provided by 3,300 different organisations;
- \$1.6 billion was provided from Australian Government and state and territory government contributions; and
- Eight million hours of domestic assistance was provided through the program, supporting more than one-third of all clients.

www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/hacc-annual-report-07-08.htm

Report on the Operation of the Aged Care Act 1997

The *2008-09 Report on the Operation of the Aged Care Act 1997* was released on 26 November. As at 30 June 2009 10,447 new aged care places were allocated:

- 211,345 people received permanent residential aged care in one of Australia's 2,783 aged care homes;
- 41,873 people received short-term respite care at these facilities;
- 64,111 older Australians received a community care package; and
- 12,635 people received transition care through 2,228 transition care places following a hospital stay.

For quality and accountability, the report featured:

- The Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency conducted 7,595 visits to aged care homes, with each home receiving at least one unannounced visit during the year;
- The Agency identified 303 homes as being non-compliant with one or more of the 44 expected outcomes. Homes found to be non-compliant with the Accreditation Standards were placed on a timetable for improvement to correct the non-compliance;
- The Aged Care Complaints Investigation Scheme undertook 3,151 visits to homes, 1,847 of which were unannounced;
- The Aged Care Complaints Investigation Scheme received 12,573 contacts during the reporting period. Nearly two-thirds of the contacts (7,962) related to concerns that aged care service providers were not meeting their responsibilities under the Act. The remaining calls were dealt with through the provision of information or referred to other relevant authorities;
- The most common issues raised with the complaints scheme related to health and personal care (4,117 cases), alleged abuse (2,034 cases, which includes allegations of a Reportable Assault), consultation and communication (1,628 cases), personnel (1,471 cases), and physical environment (1,386 cases);
- There were 1,411 notifications of alleged reportable assaults which included 1,121 allegations of unreasonable use of force and 272 allegations of unlawful sexual contact and 18 related to both (Police are responsible for determining whether criminal charges should be laid and the Department investigates whether the provider has met their responsibilities under the Aged Care Act); and

- The Department issued 163 Notices of Non-Compliance and 30 Notices of Decision to Impose Sanctions.

Increased funding

- \$9.1 billion was spent on ageing and aged care – up 9.1 per cent;
- \$6.5 billion was spent on residential aged care –7.8 per cent;
- \$479.7 million was spent on Community Aged Care Packages –7.1 per cent;
- \$256.3 million was spent on Extended Aged Care at Home packages, including tailored dementia packages - 28.9 per cent;
- \$1.094 billion was provided for the joint Commonwealth, state and territory Home and Community Care Program –8.1 per cent; and
- Almost one in four residential aged care facilities undertook new building work, refurbishments or upgrades during the year, investing \$3 billion in construction activity.

Productivity Commission Inquiry into Long-Term Disability Care and Support

The Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, has announced that the Productivity Commission will investigate the feasibility, costs and benefits of replacing the current system of disability services with a new approach which provides long-term essential care and support for people with severe or profound disabilities however acquired.

The inquiry will examine a range of options for long-term care and support including consideration of whether a no-fault social insurance approach to disability is appropriate in Australia. It will also examine if a scheme would fit with Australia’s health, aged care, income support and injury insurance systems.

The Productivity Commission will report to Government in July 2011.

ACSA Comment

The broad scope of the inquiry has been welcomed by ACSA, with Greg Mundy saying that a “whole of community” approach to disability support was essential.

Disability comes in many forms and we are particularly delighted that the prime minister has included aged care in the scope of the Commission’s inquiry. It was essential to simplify the system for funding and delivering long term care to people with a disability.

We already know that many older people living with a disability are being denied access to the levels of care and support they need, due to inadequate funding, delays in assessments, and confusing regulatory requirements.

A simplified system which assures the funding and delivery of long term care and support to people with a disability, regardless of its cause, is long over due for millions of Australians.

Inquiry into Planning Options and Services for People Ageing with a Disability

On 25 November the Senate referred the following matter to the Community Affairs References Committee for inquiry and report by 2 September 2010: Access to planning options and services for people with a disability to ensure their continued quality of life as they and their carers age, and to identify any inadequacies in the choice and funding of planning options currently available to people ageing with a disability and their carers.

Individuals and organisations have been invited to make submissions by 28 May 2010. Further information is available at: http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/wit_sub/index.htm

National Seniors Housing Report

National Seniors Australia has released *Moving or staying put: Deciding where to live in later life*.

The National Seniors report found that two in three Australians are moving home between the aged of 55 and 75 due to factors such as the ongoing need to maintain their homes or a decline in their partner's health.

The Report is available on National Seniors' Productive Ageing Website www.productiveageing.com.au/site/

Making It Fair - Employment and Workplace Relations Committee Report into Pay Equity

This report by the House of Representatives Employment and Workplace Relations Committee has highlighted the continuing gap in wages between women and men and points to the aged care sector as an example of ingrained and sustained discrimination.

“There was a great deal of evidence presented that went to the situation of women employed in the aged care sector.... it is clear that action needs to be taken to improve wages and conditions...I am aware of the dependence on the Australian government for the funding of this sector. I urge the responsible Ministers... to look at how we can responsibly increase the funding for wages in this sector,” states Sharryn Jackson, Inquiry chair.

The report is available from the Committee's website at: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ewr/payequity/report.htm>

Pay Equity Test Case

The Aged Care Industry Council (ACIC) of which ACSA is a member has responded to a pay equity test case in the social and community services sector by making a submission to the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC).

ACIC has submitted that the Heads of Agreement between the federal government and the Australian Services Union (ASU) refers only to employers and employees in the (currently) existing Social and Community Services.

It has also said that employers and employees in the home and community care sector (including aged care home care) were not part of or involved in proceedings concerning the Queensland Pay Equity decision that initiated the pay equity order agreed to by the Federal Government for these workers.

ACSA Comment

ACSA issued a release supporting the concept of equal pay but noting that without a firm commitment to funding, job losses and service reductions would follow from its introduction.

New Special Needs Category for Care Leavers

The Federal Government will set up a service to help the Forgotten Australians find their families, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced when he apologised to more than half a million Australians who were raised in church or state care.

Mr Rudd said a "find and connect service" would help people locate their personal and family history files, through a national database that would collate and index existing state records.

Mr Rudd said the Government would also identify care leavers as a special needs group for aged-care purposes, meaning that aged-care providers would receive help to provide appropriate care, including counselling and support services, to people who had been separated from their families. Enabling amendments have already been tabled in Parliament.

Victorian Rural Facility Receives Extra Aged Care Funding

Sea Lake residents will continue to have access to health and aged care services in their local community thanks to a \$2.35 million funding package from the Victorian and Federal Governments.

Victorian Health Minister Daniel Andrews said the funding would secure the future of the Sea Lake and District Health Service, which will operate as a Multi-Purpose Service providing bed-based residential aged care and community health services. It will also assist the board with governance and administration.

Minister Elliot said that the Multi-Purpose Service model provides for the delivery of flexible and localised aged care and health services.

Denticare Analysis

The NHHRC proposed *Denticare* scheme has been analysed by the Parliamentary Library which reports that while it is a significant dental reform proposal it has generated a mixed response. This diversity of views makes the task for government even more difficult. It says that navigating

these diverse views and resolving some of the complex issues raised by stakeholders will ensure that the means of providing affordable dental care remains a challenge for policy makers. The analysis is available at: www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/bn/sp/Denticare.pdf

Aged Care - University Link

IRT (Illawarra Retirement Trust), has signed an agreement with the University of Canberra to cooperate over research and teaching in a number of health disciplines, as well as on the social benefits of a close relationship between the University and Kangara Waters, an IRT retirement village in Canberra.

Other areas to be explored under the agreement include inviting residents to become mentors for University students, research into how the built environment contributes to independent living by older Australians and potentially establishing a supervised student physiotherapy clinic at Kangara Waters.

Alzheimer's Australia Quality Dementia Care Network

Alzheimer's Australia has announced the establishment of the National Quality Dementia Care Network and says that it is a world first in bringing together researchers and industry and consumers as truly equal partners in dementia care.

The Network will promote collaboration between dementia care researchers, consumers and service providers with the objective of improving the quality of dementia care through the rapid dissemination and uptake of research evidence. Current and future research will be translated into education and training initiatives, policy recommendations and procedures for best practice in dementia care.

The Network will be funded through the generous support of The JO & JR Wicking Trust at ANZ Trustees and BUPA. The Network is expected to be operational from mid 2010.

Migrant Families in Aged Care: An Intergenerational Perspective

Presentations from the Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing's seminar, *Migrant Families in Aged Care: An Intergenerational Perspective*, are available for downloading. www.culturaldiversity.com.au

National Rural Health Alliance Creative Ageing Seminar

Those who may have missed the NHRA seminar '*From creative ageing to end-of-life in rural and remote Australia*', can access the presentations online. Go to: www.ruralhealth.org.au and click on the left hand column hotlink Public Seminars.

Legal Rights for Older Australians

Attorney-General Robert McClelland has tabled the Australian Government's response to the House of Representatives Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee's Older People and the Law Report.

The report contains 48 recommendations addressing a range of legal issues facing older Australians including fraud and financial abuse, powers of attorney, advance health care planning, guardianship and administration, family agreements, barriers to older Australians accessing legal services, age discrimination and retirement villages. Under the changes, older people will also have clearly defined powers of attorney rights.

Official Quality Guide on Falls in Residential Aged Care

Commonwealth, State and Territory Health Ministers have endorsed a comprehensive guide *Preventing Falls and Harm From Falls in Older People: Best Practice Guidelines for Australian Hospitals, Residential Aged Care Facilities and Community Care 2009*.

“These new guidelines consider the evidence and recommend actions in the three main care settings: the community, hospitals and residential aged care facilities,” Chief Executive of the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (ACSQHC) , Professor Chris Baggoley, said.

“ACSQHC is charged with leading and coordinating improvements in the safety and quality of health care for all Australians. These new guidelines are an important part of that work.”

[http://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/internet/safety/publishing.nsf/Content/com-pubs_FallsGuidelines/\\$File/30458-Guidelines-RACF.PDF](http://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/internet/safety/publishing.nsf/Content/com-pubs_FallsGuidelines/$File/30458-Guidelines-RACF.PDF)

National Parking Permit Design

Disability Ministers and Roads/Transport Ministers have endorsed a consistent national permit design for Disability Parking Schemes. The new Australian Disability Parking Permit will be rolled out nation-wide from 2010 to 900,000 current permit holders.

Harmonisation of the parking schemes has been proposed for permit design, eligibility criteria and permit concessions.

Work will continue on the development of national minimum standards for parking concessions and the eligibility criteria under the Australian Disability Parking Scheme which is expected to be implemented by 2012. www.researchaustralia.org

Retirement Expectations and Retirement Savings

According to the 24th AMP.NATSEM Income and Wealth Report, *Don't stop thinking about tomorrow*, Australians are not saving enough to afford a comfortable retirement yet they are working less and spending more years in retirement than ever before. The report is available at: <http://www.canberra.edu.au/centres/natsem/publications?>

Nurse Practitioner Report

A new survey carried out with assistance from Australian Catholic University (ACU) staff and published in the Australian Health Review has found that Australia is failing to make best use of nurse practitioners within the health system.

Professor Sandy Middleton, Director of ACU's National Centre for Clinical Outcomes Research, said that this first national survey found that only about 75 per cent of respondents were employed as nurse practitioners.

"Our research makes clear that nurse practitioners are facing significant barriers to providing service in this important health provider role, Professor Middleton said. Given widespread workforce shortages and rising health care costs, we simply cannot afford to under-utilise this important sector of the health workforce."

www.aushealthreview.com.au/publications/articles/issues/ahr_33_4_1109/ahr_33_4_679.html

Death Rates Steady

Death rates in Australia have remained steady over recent years, according to figures released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The standardised death rate was six deaths per 1000 people in 2008- unchanged since 2005. Twenty years ago, the rate was nine deaths per 1000 people.

Life Expectancies

The gap between male and female life expectancies at birth is now the lowest it has been for over 50 years, according to *Australian Life Tables 2005-07*, the latest investigation into the mortality of the Australian population by the Australian Government Actuary.

Average improvement in mortality over the five years since the previous investigation was almost 50 per cent higher for males than for females over the childhood and young adult ages. This has led to a narrowing of the gap between male and female life expectancies at all ages.

Males born today can expect to live for 79.0 years without making any allowance for improvement in mortality rates. Female life expectancy at birth is 83.7 years, resulting in a gap of less than five years for the first time since the 1940's. In the early 1980's, the gap was over seven years.

<http://www.aga.gov.au/publications/>

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