

Fixing Australia's aged care system

Australia's population is ageing and our aged care system isn't keeping up. Too many older Australians aren't getting the support they need, or they're fighting to be treated with dignity and respect.

The Federal Government has invested an additional \$5 billion in our aged care sector over five years. However, almost 12 months on from the landmark reports into aged care operations, quality and standards by David Tune, Kate Carnell and Professor Ron Paterson, we're still waiting for many of their recommendations to be implemented.

To build a world-leading aged care system that provides the amount of quality care older Australians and their families deserve we urgently need:

1 More home care packages so older Australians *never wait more than 3 months*



Despite the investment of tens of thousands of new home care packages, consumers are still waiting unacceptably long times to receive the level of care they have been assessed as needing.

An additional 30,000 high level home care packages are required to ensure older Australians never have to wait longer than three months for the care that matches their assessed needs.

We need...

Funding for 30,000 more high level home care packages so no one waits more than 3 months for care.

2 More power to residents and their families by giving them *control over residential care funding*



COTA Australia and the Government's own Aged Care Sector Committee's Aged Care Roadmap envisage a future where individually assessed aged care is available to all regardless of whether it's at home or in a nursing home.

Choosing residential aged care should be no different to choosing where people live at any other time of their lives, or to receiving care at home. However, right now the government allocates "bed licences" to aged care providers, which means older Australians are forced to go where a funded bed is available— even if it isn't their first (or second) choice, or is far away from their loved ones. It also means there's less incentive for providers to deliver excellence because there's no reward.

If we're going to improve the quality of our residential aged care services we need to give residents and families the power to decide how and on what terms to spend their residential care funding, and which provider to spend it with.

We need...

Legislation by March 2019 to set a definite date to put residential aged care places in the hands of consumers, not providers.

3 More information and increased transparency for consumers



Accessing our aged care system is like navigating an obstacle course blindfolded – with no obligation for providers to publish any information about their pricing, or their performance. Consumers need clear and easily understood information so they can make informed decisions about which provider to choose.

This information should include published reviews from existing service users, clear information about client contributions and service costs, quality information about the service, including staffing levels, and accurate information about the specialised services and clients a provider can effectively support.

We need...

Compulsory publication of aged care services, prices and performance by mid-2019.

4 More funding to secure the right quality and mix of aged care staff



We need improved staffing levels, training, and better pay in the aged care sector – not mandated ratios, but more and better trained staff where gaps exist to ensure the highest quality care for all older Australians.

We need to make the aged care sector more attractive to work in – with real career paths, better on the job training and qualifications, and much better pay for the entire workforce, especially for personal carers and middle management, but also for nurses and general staff.

To achieve this we need to ensure the right amount of funding is provided to deliver appropriate staffing levels and skills mix – including through adequate government funding and equitable, consistent and sustainable consumer contributions.

We need...

To build the capacity of the aged care workforce to deliver quality care.

5 More random and targeted totally unannounced inspections



The Government's current 'unannounced' inspection regime signals to residential aged care providers that they will receive a visit from the Quality Agency in the 90-day window before their accreditation expires.

While COTA Australia supports this as an interim step, the Government should move away as soon as possible from known windows to a truly unannounced scheme after the Quality and Safety Commission starts – with randomised visits occurring at least every year, and targeted visits more often for providers at risk so older Australians and their families can be assured of quality care every day of the week, every week of the year.

We need...

Random and targeted totally unannounced inspections by 1 January 2020.