

MEDIA RELEASE

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COTA welcomes Labor commitment to aged care reform

Council on the Ageing (COTA) Australia, the peak body for older Australians, has welcomed the announcement of significant additional funding for aged care reform in today's Budget Reply speech by Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese.

COTA Australia Chief Executive, Ian Yates welcomed the Labor party's commitment, if elected, to provide \$2.5 Billion over four years, for important additional workforce measures, including:

- funding 24 hour 7 days a week nurses in all residential aged care from 1 July 2023. This is the next stage of increasing nursing recommended by the Royal Commission – but a year earlier than recommended - after the first step already adopted by the government
- implementing the second stage of extra staffing recommended by the Royal Commission to provide an average 215 minutes of care per resident, including an average 44 minutes of nursing care; the first stage of 200 minutes with 40 minutes nursing already being implemented.
- intervention in the Fair Work Commission to support a substantial increase in aged care award wages, as an essential step in rebuilding the aged care workforce; and then funding the Fair Work Commission decision.

All of these measures go further than the Government's current package, with Government decisions on some remaining royal commission recommendations such as the extra hours and 24/7 nursing still to be decided.

"Getting workforce right is an essential step in building a world class aged care system in which excellence is the expectation not the exception", Mr Yates said. "We support the steps announced in the Budget Reply; they are essential, but they must be coupled with other measures to ensure that aged care is truly built around the older person, not around providers or indeed professionals, who are both vital to but not the purpose of the system.

"We recognise that Labor cannot put a cost on the outcome of the Fair Work Commission case until both the quantum and the staging of the increase are known; just as the Government could not include this in the Budget for the same reason. Whoever is in government will have to pay it.

Mr Yates also warmly welcomed the headline commitment to measures that will require better meals experience, minimum nutrition requirements, and create greater accountability and transparency over use of taxpayer funding. "The Royal Commission recommendations already adopted by Government have set us on this road – we look forward to Labor sharing their additional plans. These are key issues for aged care consumers.

"We look forward to more details of the Opposition's plans. Reforming aged care is not an easy task, there are few silver bullets, there are still too many poorer quality providers, so we look forward to working with Labor on the measures they have foreshadowed.

Mr Yates also called on Labor (and indeed all parties) to commit to the implementation of the Royal Commission recommendations which now include the Government's response, and the detailed planning, consultation and timeframes already well underway.

"COTA welcomes Labor putting aged care front and centre in the forthcoming election. We have come a long way since 2007 when neither party released an aged care policy. Long overdue.

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COTA Australia is the peak policy development, advocacy and representation organisation for older Australians, representing COTAs in every State and Territory and through them over 500,000 older Australians.