Briefing for members, May 2021

Government aged care reforms and implications for the sector

Overview of reforms

On 11May 2021, the Australian Government released its formal response to the final report by the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, accompanied by budget announcements totalling $17.7 billion over the next four years.

Of the 148 recommendations in the report, the government accepted 126, partially accepted/indicated further consideration was required in relation to16, and did not accept 6.

The government has signalled major reforms to the overall aged care system, including:

- Development of a new Aged Care Act, to be introduced by 2023
- A single assessment pathway and a single assessment workforce
- Increases in daily funding for residential aged care services (an extra $10 per bed per day) and significant growth in home care packages (80,000 packages)
- New daily care benchmarks for residential care, including targets for nursing care (from October 2023, every Aged Care resident must receive 200 minutes of care per day including 40 minutes with a registered nurse)
- Investments in expanding aged care workforce supply through funding of additional training places and incentives for nurses
- A new navigation workforce (both through Services Australia offices and establishment of local Community Care finders) and additional resources to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, special needs groups and those in regional and remote areas access support
- Major changes to funding processes and structures, including:
    - Consolidation of existing home care funding streams into a new Care at Home package which will include a specific category for assistive technology
    - Introduction of a new residential aged care assessment and funding model (the Australian National Aged Care Classification)
    - establishment of an Aged Care Pricing Authority
    - discontinuation of ACAR as the mechanism for allocation of residential aged care places
- Establishment of a new starred rating system for residential aged care and strengthening of the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission
- A single screening system, register and code of conduct for all care workers across Aged Care, the NDIS, and the Department of Veterans Affairs
- Increasing investment in primary care to expand access for older Australians.

The Government has brought these reforms together into what it describes as the five pillars to support aged care reform (home care; residential aged care services and sustainability; residential aged care quality and safety; workforce; and governance).

It has summarised these, and their proposed staging over the five year period, in the infographic at Attachment A. This information is also available as an accessible PDF, which you can download here.

How do the government's commitments measure up against the sector's asks?

In December 2019, Vision 2020 Australia made a submission to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, detailing 14 recommendations which would improve system settings for older Australians with vision loss.

Some of the government commitments should deliver significant improvements for our sector, including changes to the way assistive technology is provided to older Australians, while other recommendations relevant to our sector remain under consideration, such as proposals that there be equity of entitlement between aged care and the NDIS.

In almost every case, there is little detail about the specific shape of reforms, so further conversations are required. These commitments represent new opportunities to pursue advocacy goals. The following table provides a high level analysis of the recommendations made by the sector, and government commitments as/where relevant.

Sector recommendation	Government Commitment
1. **Amend legislation** to provide access to blindness and low vision services and equipment for older Australians who are otherwise healthy and well, to help keep them independent and active	A new aged care act to commence July 2023.
2. **Amend the assessment model** to more fully recognise, assess and respond to needs of older Australians with blindness or vision loss	ACAT and RAS assessments to be replaced with single unified assessment service as per Royal Commission Rec. 28.
3. Adjust current tender documents and contractual arrangements to ensure that where an expert assessment in relation to vision loss is required, **the specialist provider is routinely reimbursed** for providing that assessment	Not explicitly addressed, but could be included as part of new assessment model.
4. **Increase funding flexibility through the CHSP and supporting early intervention** approaches for older Australians diagnosed with progressive vision loss that will maintain their function and minimise their need for more costly, ongoing support	Partially addressed by new unified care-at-home system and single assessment pathway, removing wait times and administrative burden.
5. **Ensure funding is sufficient** to meet the costs of specialist assessment, supports and services for older Australians who are blind or have low vision	Royal Commission Recs to provide supports equivalent to NDIS (72) and abolish co-contributions for assistive tech (125) remain under consideration. Assistive technology and home modification funding will be

Sector recommendation	Government Commitment
	reconsidered as per Rec. 34. Govt accepts in principle Rec. 41, which says that buy Jul 24, Aged Care Provision Ratio should be replaced with needs-based funding allocation system.
6. **Strengthen the obligation on providers to ensure that the basic visual needs of older Australians are met**, recognising the significant role that vision plays in contributing to continued independence and participation	Could be addressed by new Aged Care Act. In response to Rec. 30, govt to implement Specialisation Verification Framework and Aged Care Data Strategy to improve service for people with diverse life experience (inc. disability).
7. Adjust current tender documents and contractual arrangements to clarify and confirm that where vision loss requires specialist service provision such as orientation and mobility training to a person living within a residential care facility in relation to vision loss, the **provider of that service is routinely reimbursed for providing that service**	Partially addressed. Govt accepts Rec. 37, suggesting new, needs-based commitments to support of people in residential care. Govt accepts in principle Rec. 38, suggesting explicit funding arrangements for allied health in residential care, including OT and optometrists.
8. Develop a **national strategy to support timely and streamlined access to the low vision aids and equipment** older Australians need	A grant-funded assistive technology category for those living at home to be introduced by July 2022 as per Rec. 34. In response to Rec 37, govt to reconsider AT provision in residential care.
9. Implement **standardised referral pathways for blindness and low vision**, so that people experiencing vision loss can access services that allow their vision to be maximised/preserved as much as possible	Not explicitly addressed, but could be achieved as part of new assessment model. See also Recs 27-31.
10. **Enhance training and development opportunities for assessors and aged care workers**, supported by appropriately tailored resources and supports	Addressed through significant new workforce training and retention measures. Only needing to train one assessment workforce re: vision loss also positive development.
11. **Trial a blindness and low vision 'hotline' for assessors**, providing expert advice and guidance to enhance assessment of older Australians with blindness or vision loss	Not yet addressed.
12. **Increase the flexibility and funding of patient transport services** for older Australians in residential aged care living with vision loss, so they can access the required sight preserving treatments	May be addressed by government measure "Residential Aged Care Quality and Safety – Improving Access to primary Care and Other

Sector recommendation	Government Commitment
	Health Services", as well as response to Recs 37 and 38.
13. **Mandate accessibility requirements for complaints processes and other key documents/processes** essential to ensuring residents with vision loss are aware of their options, choices and avenues for raising issues and suggestions	May be partially addressed through new Aged Care Act and/or new national quality and safeguards system. Govt accepts Rec. 24, for a starred system allowing people to compare providers, and Rec. 27, to improve the usefulness and accessibility of information offered through My Aged Care portal.
14. Clarify expectations for the **accessibility of aged care facilities**, and embed this in quality assurance mechanisms	Could be addressed through unified regulation framework. Govt responses to Rec. 22, regarding quality indicators for service delivery, and Rec. 30, regarding designing for diverse groups of people, inc. disability, also relevant here.

The five pillars of aged care reform, 2021-2025

$17.7 billion
5 pillars over 5 years

Pillar 1: Home care

2021
- 40,000 more home care packages.
- Senior Australians able to access assistance and information about aged care through 325 Services Australia Service Centres, and aged care specialists in 70 Service Australia centres.
- Extra support for informal carers.

2022
- 40,000 more home care packages.
- Respite services for 8,400 additional clients every year.

2023
- 500 local Community Care Finders provide targeted, specialist face-to-face support to vulnerable senior Australians to help them access aged care and connect with other health and social supports.
- Senior Australians can access a new support at home program.
- Single assessment workforce will expand to the new support at home program.

2024
- New support at home program supports senior Australians to stay in their homes and keep connected to their communities.
- Single assessment workforce will continue assessments for the new support at home program.

Pillar 2: Residential aged care services and sustainability

2021
- Supplement of $10 per resident per day.
- Continuation of the increases to the homeless and viability supplements.
- New prudential monitoring, compliance and intervention to help providers build financial sustainability, capability and resilience.
- Independent Hospital and Aged Care Pricing Authority established, extending role of existing hospitals pricing authority to include aged care advisory function.

2022
- New funding model to improve quality of care for 240,000 people using residential care and 67,000 people using residential respite care each year.
- Average care minutes for each resident increased to 200 minutes per day, including 40 minutes of registered nurse time.
- Registered nurse on site for a minimum of 16 hours per day.
- Structural Adjustment Program delivers increased provider viability and a strengthened aged care market.
- Single assessment workforce introduced to improve the experience of senior Australians in residential care.
- Better reporting, including through Star Ratings, to help senior Australians make easier comparisons and improve choice of care.

2023
- Minimum care time becomes mandatory.
- Annual funding increases and price setting take into account advice from the new Independent Hospital and Aged Care Pricing Authority.

2024
- Increased choice for senior Australians receiving residential care with care packages assigned to consumers, not providers.
- New residential aged care accommodation framework gives senior Australians more choice and improves accessibility and dementia-friendly accommodation.
- Aged Care Approval Round discontinued.

2025
- Improved service suitability that ensures the care needs and preferences of senior Australians in residential aged care are met.

Pillar 3: Residential aged care quality and safety

2021
- Immediate improvements to the quality of care in dementia, diversity, food and nutrition services.
- Stronger clinical care standards developed by the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care.
- Up to 120,000 additional GP services through boosted Aged Care Access Incentive.
- Increasing dementia care capability delivers better outcomes for people living with dementia.
- Palliative care services expanded to support end-of-life care at home.

2022
- Residents access improved care through Primary Health Networks facilitating telehealth and out-of-hours triage services.
- Expansion of the Serious Incident Response Scheme gives 1 million senior Australians receiving home and community care greater protection.
- Stronger presence of Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission in facilities with an extra 1,500 site audits.
- Providers to report regularly to residents and families on care and commencement of Star Rating system.

2023
- Improved support and training in dementia care and minimising restraint (restrictive practices).

2024
- National Aged Care Data Strategy improves the information that is available to senior Australians about the quality in aged care.
- New independent regulatory authority established following review of the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission.

2025
- Senior Australians receive high quality, compassionate care.
- Confidence in aged care is rebuilt.

Pillar 4: Workforce

2021
- Up to 6,000 new personal care workers in workplaces.
- Surge locum workforce capacity in regional and rural locations.
- Improved training in dementia care and minimising restraint (restrictive practices).

2022
- Up to 7,000 new personal care workers in workplaces.
- 33,800 additional training places rolled out over two years for personal care workers to attain a Certificate III in Individual Support (Ageing).
- More registered nurses in workplaces due to nurse incentive and financial support schemes.
- Single assessment workforce in place to conduct assessments across residential and home care.

2023
- Additional training places for personal care workers to attain a Certificate III in Individual Support (Ageing).

2024
- Continued growth of the aged care workforce and a demonstrable increase in registered nurses choosing aged care as their career.

2025
- Tangible improvements seen in staffing levels, skill mix and training of the care workforce.
- Workforce continues to meet the demand for aged care services, particularly in home care.

Pillar 5: Governance

2021
- Initial rollout of expanded regional network to improve local planning and understanding of needs.
- Council of Elders established to provide a direct voice to Government.
- National Aged Care Advisory Council established to provide expert advice to Government.
- Expanded capital infrastructure grants available to improve access to better quality aged care services for First Nations people and those in rural and remote locations, or who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- Improved services and health outcomes for people in remote and Indigenous communities as a result of additional aged care funding.

2022
- New workforce of trusted First Nations people to assist Older First Nations people navigate and access aged and disability care.

2023
- Introduction of a new, values based Aged Care Act.

2025
- Strong and effective governance of aged care is in place with senior Australians at the centre and improved care outcomes consistently delivered.