

Consumer groups outline 10 key points for the future of aged care in Australia

An alliance of aged care consumer and carer groups today outlined their shared vision for aged care.

It comes at a time when the aged care system has never been under such intense scrutiny and pressure. Failures have been exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic and through the Aged Care Royal Commission, which this week concluded its last scheduled hearings.

The alliance includes Carers Australia, COTA Australia, Dementia Australia, the Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia, National Seniors Australia and the Older Persons Advocacy Network.

The 10 shared principles will help all older Australians get the support they choose, when and where they need it and be treated with dignity and respect, by an aged care workforce that is trained and equipped to provide the standard of care older Australians and their families expect and deserve.

The full statement is available overleaf and can be summarised as including:

1. A better Aged Care Act.
2. A simple system where care is guaranteed within 30 days.
3. Full transparency and easy to understand indicators to help inform consumer choice.
4. A trained, registered and qualified workforce.
5. Proper recognition and support for the role of unpaid family/friend carers.
6. Easy to understand information and local solutions.
7. A strongly resourced regulator that takes robust action to ensure consumer protections.
8. Services that are inclusive, culturally safe and sensitive.
9. A funding model that ensures sufficient taxpayer funding, control by consumers over their funding, independent pricing and transparency in how funds are spent.
10. Better integration of other health and wellbeing services with aged care.

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Quotes attributable to:

Carers Australia CEO Liz Callaghan

“The Aged Care Royal Commission has rightly shone a light on issues that matter to the community, including family and friend carers. Future reform must address these ten points in order to meet community expectations and deliver on quality of care.”

(Council on the Ageing) COTA Australia Chief Executive Ian Yates AM

“It’s time to overhaul a system that puts the needs of providers and bureaucracy above the human needs of every older Australian. Structurally, culturally and legislatively we have the opportunity to rebuild our aged care system so that it places the needs and preferences of consumers at its very centre. Older Australians must have both choice and control over the supports they receive – whether that’s at home, in specialist housing, or in a residential aged care setting. Above all, the system must ensure every Australian enjoys the highest quality of life as we age.”

Dementia Australia CEO Maree McCabe

It is vital for the human rights of people living with dementia, their families and carers to be reflected in a reimagined aged care system.

“Around 459,000 Australians are living with dementia. Consistent and equitable access to quality dementia care must be a cornerstone of aged care, and we must focus on building the capacity of our workforce to understand and support people with dementia.”

Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia Chair Mary Patetsos

“Central to any reform is addressing the increasingly diverse profiles of the ageing population. Catering to culture and language specific needs of consumers and investing in bilingual and bicultural staff should be core business practices of all aged care providers. The current pandemic has also reminded us that communities help facilitate access to services. They need support doing this crucial role in the aged care service ecosystem.”

National Seniors Australia Chief Advocate Ian Henschke

“This year’s budget must finally fund enough packages to make sure the neglect ends, and no one waits more than a month for the home care they need. We also need a new system that tracks where the money goes & punishes providers who put profit before people and cause suffering and death.”

Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN) CEO Craig Gear OAM

“Everyone will benefit from an improved aged care system. As our population ages, we need a system that allows older people to contribute and belong. Older people and their carers deserve better.”

An aged care system needs to have...

1. A **better Aged Care Act** that is designed to uphold human rights and ensure consumer choice and control; containing stronger protections for consumers; and better accountability of aged care providers, with tiered enforcement measures and penalties.
2. A simple **system where care is guaranteed within 30 days** and easy to access whether at home, in the community or in residential aged care (including future de-institutionalised models).
3. Requirements that ensures **full transparency** about staffing, quality measures, complaints, compliance and financial outcomes and supported by **easy to understand indicators to help inform consumer choice**.
4. A **trained, registered and qualified workforce** across all care settings, with the right number of staff to ensure quality support and care, with the right skills to meet all their consumers needs and positive attitudes to working with older people.
5. **Proper recognition and support for the role of unpaid family/friend carers** who help people to stay at home, with dedicated flexible carer support services designed to preserve their health and wellbeing.
6. **Easy to understand information and local solutions** available for older people and their families/friends, supported by care finding, advocacy or case management when they need it to ensure older people access and receive the care they need, when they need it.
7. A **strongly resourced regulator that takes robust action to ensure consumer protections**, and fosters public confidence in quality aged care through vigorously investigating, enforcing and prosecuting breaches of standards utilising a wide range of enforcement tools and penalties.
8. Core business practices that respect all clients with diverse characteristics and life experiences, by ensuring all **services are inclusive, culturally safe and sensitive**.
9. A **funding model** that grows with the population, ensures sufficient taxpayer funding; balanced with consumer contributions where they can afford to pay. Future funding will provide individuals control over their funding, introduce independent pricing regulated by Government and ensure transparency by service providers in how funds are spent.
10. **Better integration of other health and wellbeing services** into aged care including but not limited to disability, general practice, palliative care, pharmacy, primary, allied, community, oral and mental health systems.

