

National Aged Care Advisory Council (NACAC)

First term achievements

On 4 October 2023, Council held a dedicated session to discuss its first term achievements and develop a forward work plan for its second term.

The following communique summarises Council's reflections on its key achievements to inform implementation of the aged care reform agenda. It will be used by Council to inform its workplan for 2024.

Establishment

The Royal Commission recognised that fresh knowledge and experience should be brought to bear in advisory committees.

Council was announced on 24 November 2021. Its inaugural meeting was held on 9 December 2021. It is chaired by Ms Andrea Coote, with membership from a cross-section of expertise across the aged care sector, such as practitioners, providers, IT systems, finance and workforce. Members are appointed as individuals based on their experience and expertise. Council reports to the Minister for Health and Aged Care and the Minister for Aged Care.

Council provides independent and expert advice to Government on key matters relating to the aged care sector. This includes ongoing advice on key issues affecting aged care arising from implementation of the Government response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, across the following areas:

- Home Care
- Residential Care
- Workforce
- Governance

Advice from Council reflects the diverse needs and expectations of older people and their families and carers, regardless of their location or circumstance, and recognises the need to protect the interests of the vulnerable and disadvantaged. Security, dignity, quality and humanity of aged care remain front and centre of all Council considerations.

Key achievements

Council has met over twenty times since its establishment. Through its collective expertise, Council has delivered real-time advice on current contextual challenges faced by the aged care sector, while focusing on future design of the system. Council has advised on foundational, whole-of-system matters including sequencing and phasing of reforms, the development of the aged care reform roadmap, sector sustainability and importance of enabling digital and data sharing platforms. Council's feedback has improved real-time monitoring of sector performance and financial sustainability.

One of the key benefits of NACAC is the ability for the Department and the Government to directly draw on the on-the-ground expertise of aged care providers, peak bodies, health professionals and researchers. As an example, in designing the funding arrangements for the aged care wage rise, NACAC was able to quickly bring together provider CFOs who were able to give technical implementation advice in regard to the impact of the wage increase on the arrangements of providers particularly in relation to on-costs and leave liabilities, and to the negotiation of home care agreements.

Council valued taking a collaborative, positive and solution-focussed approach to its advice. It brought together a cross-sector perspective to provide timely and succinct advice to the Minister following each meeting.

Council explored ways to work together with the Council of Elders (COE) to better support the Minister, particularly through close collaboration between the Chairs. Council's Chair presented to COE, and the Chair of COE is a member of the National Aged Care Advisory Council. In June 2023, joint advice was presented to the Minister on the impact of dementia. By agreement between the Council Chair and the Chair of Council of Elders, Council will continue to explore options for provision of joint advice to support the Minister.

Council established an effective working relationship with the Acting Inspector-General of Aged Care, with in camera meetings held at the conclusion of formal meeting proceedings. The Acting Inspector-General of Aged Care supports continuation of in camera meetings with members at the conclusion of formal NACAC proceedings, at approximately four meetings per year.

The following sections present a snapshot of Council's advice across whole-of-system and foundational matters, key reforms within the aged care roadmap, and current and emerging issues. The summary is not exhaustive, as Council has provided input across a vast array of issues since its establishment.

The snapshot demonstrates the value that Council brought to the Minister and Department as a sounding board for proposals. Through early engagement, Council can sector views, 'stress testing' materials ahead of their release for broader consultation and comment. Equally, Council has been instrumental in promoting participation by the sector and older people, particularly aged care service participants, in public consultation undertaken by the Department to inform aged care reforms.

Whole of system, foundational matters

- *Phasing and public communication of future reforms*
Council was pivotal in the establishment of the Aged Care Reform Roadmap, voicing the needs of the sector who sought greater clarity on the nature and sequencing of future reform activity. Council provided advice on priority areas for inclusion in the original Roadmap, released by the Minister in June 2023, as well as guidance on the visual format to ensure it was readily understood. Their role will continue as the reforms progress, and the Roadmap is updated, to ensure it remains a useful tool to support sector readiness for reform.
- *The new Aged Care Act*
Council provided detailed advice on balancing interests and potential issues with operation of legislative components. To date, Council input has informed the drafting stages for rights, information confidentiality, records management, reporting and information, and data use and sharing. Members have additionally shared a range of examples to stress test the proposed information management framework for the new Act. The new Act remains a priority for Council in 2024. Council will provide dedicated support to the Department on the planned communication strategy and materials. This will include strategies to improve reach into service providers, including board directors and aged care resident committees.
- *Digital and data strategies*
Based on Council's feedback, the Department is integrating the data and digital strategy work. Council recently identified areas with significant potential to achieve improved outcomes for older people, and greater system efficiency, through improved use of data and digital tools. An exposure draft of the strategy is scheduled to be publicly released in October 2023. Council will provide advice on the consultation approach in November 2023. A member with expert knowledge is working very closely with the Department to share their significant expertise.

- *Sector sustainability*
Council provided early input to phase two of the market strategy. Delivering equitable outcomes for people across Australia is a Council priority. Council's feedback emphasised that community's understanding of a 'market' for aged care is low and this might impact communications. Council will continue to contribute to the strategy's development. Over time, Council has suggested a series of measures that Government could take to further reduce financial pressure on the system, including improved analysis to support sector financial planning; better understanding and managing the cumulative impact of reform; and workforce expansion.
- *Strategies to support positive ageing*
Council provided advice on long-term policies and strategies that would encourage positive ageing. Council supported the development of strategies to promote respect for older people and to address ageism. Council's suggestions included the role of a social safety net, ways to harness technology and innovation, improving responses to population diversity, using Government levers to promote more fit-for-purpose housing options for older people, and options for nuanced communication strategies.

Home Care

- *Reforming In-Home Aged Care*
Council informed the Department's approach to consultation to identify the true cost of operating home care services which meet the aspirations of the Royal Commission, requirements of the Government, legislation and regulators, and expectations of consumers and stakeholders. Council's advice is informing design of the reformed program, including getting the claim and reimbursement systems right; keeping best elements of the current program to protect vulnerable older people; and getting care management settings right for people who have lower-level aged care needs, but who are highly vulnerable. In particular, concerns raised by the Council about the impact of reforms on CHSP service providers informed the Department's approach to funding for a subset of service providers delivering services such as meals, transport and group social support. Council will continue to collaborate with the Department in 2024 on the new program.

Residential Care

- *24/7 nursing*
Council discussed the benefits, challenges and implications for the sector, consumers, service providers, clinicians, and allied health practitioners arising from the introduction of 24/7 nursing requirement. Council's advice on workforce pressures, the situation for rural and remote providers, and nurse-patient ratios, informed the Department's development of the operational model and transitional arrangements.
- *Star Ratings*
Council supported labelling conventions that promoted an improvement approach in Star Ratings and contributed to the criteria to qualify for different Star Ratings. Council advice informed accessibility considerations, particularly for older people experiencing cognitive decline, communication difficulties, or people whose first language is not English. Council's advice also informed the Department's communications to the sector ahead of launch. Members will work with the Department to develop additional categories of Star Ratings for allied health and quality of life. Council will continue to work with the Department on options to build on Star Ratings, using quality rating measures to nudge practice towards areas where evidence shows improved outcomes for older people can be achieved.

- *Baby boomer aged care needs*

Council held an in-depth discussion about the impact of the baby boom generation on the aged care system. Council identified ten priority action areas to ensure the aged care system can meet the needs of this generation in a sustainable way. Of particular importance to Council was embedding and promoting the rights of older people into aged care; seamless integration of aged care and the health system; culturally based support for First Nations communities; and responding to people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Council's advice informed the development of the National Dementia Action Plan. It is also informing the Department's development of the market strategy.
- *Dementia and its impact on aged care*

Through the dedicated 'deep dive' on dementia and its impact, including on aged care reform, Council's joint advice with the Council of Elders has informed the drafting of the National Dementia Action Plan. Council advised that public education campaigns in schools could work to create a generation that does not stigmatise dementia and works to normalise the experience of dementia. Other priorities for Council included consideration of a standardised human-rights based model of care; improving the safety of people living with dementia; developing more culturally safe dementia services for First Nations people and culturally and linguistically diverse people living with dementia; and improving the coordination and linkages within the health system.
- *Voting arrangements in residential aged care for the Voice referendum*

Council met with the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) to discuss how older people living in residential aged care would be engaged in the Voice referendum. Council emphasised the importance of AEC systems promoting the rights and dignity of older people, including those with dementia or cognitive decline. Council noted the referendum offers an important opportunity to promote voting to First Nations Elders living in residential aged care. AEC worked with the Council to expand its networks with First Nations organisations to ensure First Nations peoples living in very remote areas were able to vote. Removing language barriers and ensuring older people's votes are supported in a politically neutral way remains a priority for Council.
- *National Aged Care Design Principles and Guidelines*

Council advised that areas of focus for further development of the material could include retrofitting to improve airflow and heating/cooling, infection prevention control, and design to increase personal safety. Council encouraged Government to promote available evidence that the principles and guidelines are cost effective.
- *Residential Aged Care Funding Reform (AN-ACC)*

Council considered the approach to integrated care planning, particularly allied health and other professionals supporting the wellbeing, reablement and restorative care of residents.
- *Dollars going to care*

Council advised on the co-design approach to assist in determining what was important to consumers, in partnership with providers. Council will discuss provider finances and operations, including new information on My Aged Care at its November 2023 meeting.
- *Care Minutes*

Council advised that broadening the definition of 'care' acknowledged the multipurpose nature of aged care work and recognised the importance of health, social and emotional wellbeing. Council suggested care minutes should focus on clear activities that enhance quality care and improve outcomes rather than on defined workforce roles, which supports recognition of lifestyle staff/social care, allied health and multipurpose roles of some staff.

Members will continue to give advice to the Department on the evaluation plan for care minutes, to build the evidence base for improved outcomes for older people.

- *Aged Care Quality Standards*
Council input informed the development of standards and the approach taken in public consultation, which received positive feedback about the level of engagement. Council will continue to collaborate with the Department into 2024 on the standards.
- *Trends in allied health*
Council discussed aged care allied health related initiatives and trends in the provision of allied health services as reported by residential aged care providers in the Quarterly Financial Report. Council considered allied health use should be supported by a multidisciplinary assessment tools and model of care, using clearly articulated health and well-being outcomes that are evidence based. The approach should reflect the respective roles of the acute health and aged care systems. Council encouraged government to explore good practice examples of effective incorporation of allied health into models of care and to be mindful of the vulnerability of people living with dementia or other cognitive impairments with respect to pain management.

Workforce

- *Information to support Government briefings on Fair Work Wages decision*
Council informed Government briefings on impacts of funding arrangements for the 15 per cent wage increase on consumers, workers and providers.
- *New regulatory model*
Council advice has informed the Department's development of a model that protects older people, while creating a regulatory system that encourages innovation, competition, and sector expansion. The new regulatory model remains a Council priority into next year.
- *National registration scheme for personal care workers*
The streamlining of criminal history screening was supported by Council. Given criminal history screening occurs on a national basis Council advised it was preferable to develop a consistent scheme that operates nationally which is integrated with criminal history screening and is also assessed on a national basis.

Governance

- *Establishment of an interim Inspector-General*
Council advised on the consultation materials for the establishment of the interim Inspector-General. Council has established a strong working relationship with the acting Inspector-General and will provide advice to inform his priorities for the coming year.
- *Aged Care Quality and Safety Commissioner*
Council offered to assist the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commissioner as she develops a program to respond to the Commission's independent capability review report.
- *First Nations Aged Care Commissioner*
Council has been consulted on the creation of an independent First Nations Aged Care Commissioner (Commissioner) to embed a First Nations' voice within the aged care system. Council looks forward to working with the interim Commissioner on the design and governance of the permanent position.