

Council of Elders (COE)

Communiqué – 20 March & 21 March 2024

Meeting with the Minister – Council had a very productive meeting with the Hon Anika Wells, Minister for Aged Care at Parliament House on Wednesday 20 March.

The Minister came to what was the second meeting of the new Council to talk about and seek their advice on Aged Care reform priorities. The Minister talked about the sequencing of initiatives to show the Government was serious about reform and to build trust. Achievements like care minutes, 24/7 nursing and dollars into care were important pieces of that. However, the Minister also highlighted that the drive to see a culture shift that supports intergenerational engagement is also a key focus, as was the drive to have more stringent accountabilities while helping the sector to flourish. With 45,000 people entering aged care every year, the need for sustainability measures that provide high quality care, a workforce and capital well into the future were essential.

Discussion focused on what council had heard from people in the community in response to the Taskforce Report and the exposure draft of the new *Aged Care Act*. Members acknowledged that it would be useful for the Department's Engagement Hub to be a one stop shop for information if it was more easily accessible.

Taskforce Report Council told the Minister that Community feedback generally support co-contributions payments for those who can afford to pay, noting the expectation for good quality care. Council discussed the complexity of implementing recommendations and how a staged transition plan with a strong communication and engagement strategy could enable a smooth adaption to new arrangements.

Clarity on the safety net and how the co-payments are likely to be structured would be welcomed noting there is very little awareness of how aged care is currently funded and a genuine concern of a two-tier system exists in the community.

Support at Home in the context of the Taskforce Report, Council said that the people in the community they talked to had the expectation of more diverse approaches to high quality care, to align with the change in demographic of the Australian ageing population and match vast multicultural needs.

As a separate point, Council talked about the need for more CALD workers and the current challenge in retention of this cohort of workers. There was also strong agreement that an intergenerational focus to connect aged care with the younger generation would also assist to ensure longevity of the sector by raising awareness of the diverse wishes and needs of older people.

Council indicated broad support for the new *Aged Care Act* which focuses on the rights of older people. Protections for the most vulnerable and whistleblowers appear to have been well accounted for. Members raised the strong view from some community members around the need for participant's rights as outlined in the Act to be enforceable, and complaints taken seriously. Transparency in how complaints are managed, and detail on fees and contributions could assist in building greater trust.

The simplification of processes such as the reduction of the number of Aged Care Quality Standards (moving from 8 Standards with 42 requirements, to 7 Standards, with 33 outcomes) was also welcomed.

Council also discussed their view that the Act should account for people with disability noting that this topic will be part of future discussions.

In closing, the Council indicated they would welcome the legislation being enacted as soon as possible and at least by the end of the year.

Consultation on Exposure Draft – Council heard the breadth of consultation activities that had been undertaken by the department, where in addition to the high number of survey responses and submissions received, face to face workshops and webinars had been well attended, with additional round table discussions that focused on First Nations, CALD, Providers and worker cohorts had been facilitated. Council looks forward to hearing about all the feedback collected. Council also discussed the need for clear definitions of terms such as person-centred care and co-design, and the value of extensive and clear communications on impacts of the legislation on both older Australians and the sector. Council has a particular interest in regard to Chapter 4 and how Home Care will be funded with the expectation that this will be informed by the Taskforce Report.

Fair Work Decision. The value of the Fair Work Commission decision to help address the challenges around workforce was acknowledged. Noting the election commitment by Government to fund the outcome, Council members talked about the challenge of sustainability. The system will need to work for those who are using it today as well as those who will need it in 50 years. The community anticipates a strong support at home scheme that doesn't have long wait times or discourage people to get the help they need when they need it. They discussed the need for ongoing attention on reform activities already delivered like 24/7 nursing to ensure the operational delivery is in line with the principles of the initiative.

Interim First Nations Aged Care Commissioner. Council met with Andrea Kelly, the interim First Nations Aged Care Commissioner and heard about her extensive consultation schedule. Council and Ms Kelly discussed some initial themes emerging from consultations to date. Council encourages people to get engaged in the Commissioner's consultations – up to date information is available here:

<https://www.health.gov.au/our-work/interim-first-nations-aged-care-commissioner/consultations>

Support at Home Restorative Care Pathway was a topic of discussion, where members talked through the program that includes 12 weeks for support at home to regain capability and to remain independent. Council highlighted that the community is seeking clarity on access criteria, particularly around timely assessment and early access to the transition programs. Council noted the value of the FAQs on the Department website at: <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/support-at-home-frequently-asked-questions-december-2023?language=en>

Clarity on the topics including Transition to Support at Home; Classification and budgets; Care management; Ongoing services; Short-term supports; and Provider Arrangements are already published here. There is also material available in printed format and of course Council will continue to meet with their networks face to face. Members encourage you to continue to raise questions and concerns by attending one of many events with Council members and departmental staff across Australia or by participating in consultations and surveys on the [aged care engagement hub](https://www.agedcareengagement.health.gov.au/) [https://www.agedcareengagement.health.gov.au/]