

# National Aged Care Advisory Council (NACAC)

## Communiqué – 25 March 2024

The Minister for Aged Care, the Hon Anika Wells MP, met with Council to discuss aged care priorities for 2024.

Council noted release of the Aged Care Taskforce Report, and conclusion of consultations on exposure draft of the new *Aged Care Act*, present critical and seminal opportunities to enable the successful transformation of aged care to be fit-for-purpose in the future. Council congratulated the Minister on appointment of the Interim First Nations Aged Care Commissioner.

**Aged Care Taskforce Response:** Council welcomed the release of the Aged Care Taskforce Report. Council is supportive of recommendations to simplify the funding system and reform consumer co-contributions. There is support for the Taskforce's focus on Government meeting the costs of clinical care; however, clarity about scope of clinical care in Support at Home will need to be thought through. Council is keen to see more detail about final design of the measure, including details of contribution costs to ensure there is equity for older people. Council reported mixed views from the sector regarding recommendations relating to reforming accommodation funding. Council intends to have a detailed discussion on accommodation funding at its 11 April 2024 meeting.

**New Aged Care Act:** Council congratulated the Minister for Aged Care and the Department of Health and Aged Care on the breadth of consultation undertaken to date. Council supports the person-centred objectives, the rights-based framework and the inclusion of supported decision making. Council suggested that Government separates the Complaints Commissioner functions in the Act to provide specific functions and statutory authority to an independently appointed Complaints Commissioner, answerable only to the Minister and Parliament. Council acknowledged that introduction of criminal penalties was not recommended by the Royal Commission but were an election commitment. Many older people have expressed the need for accountability and penalties where there has been abuse and neglect resulting in poor outcomes for individual clients and residents. Feedback received from providers and the workforce, however, indicates that if penalties in the exposure draft remain as currently written, there may be a risk to workforce supply. Council will consider implications of this issue at its 11 April meeting.

**Aged Care Workforce:** Council discussed the challenges of workforce retention, including in thin markets – these challenges include workers' access to housing, childcare, and other social supports. Members noted the recent wage increases have had a key impact on reducing turnover. Workers often report that having time to focus on care rather than administration influences their decision whether to remain in the workforce. Council highlighted the importance of having data to assist accurate workforce projections, together with access to learning and development for staff, including the role of mentors and role models. Council looks forward to further engagement and providing advice on what is working and what else could be implemented.

**Support at Home:** Council provided feedback on operation of the current Short Term Restorative Care (STRC) Program. Council emphasised rapid intervention, before acute deterioration sets in, as essential to achieving outcomes, such as diversion from hospital admission. In doing so, timely and effective restorative care has the capacity to reduce overall health system costs. Council also raised the importance of access to restorative care by those with cognitive impairment. It was noted there is some confusion about the term 'restorative care' – effective restorative care needs to include rehabilitation and reablement. Different objectives and features of the STRC Program and the Transition Care Program need to be clearly articulated, to ensure aspects of avoiding hospital care and receiving post-hospital care are all covered. Members look forward to working closely with the Department to realise the potential of short-term restorative care.

The next Council meeting is scheduled for 11 April 2024.