

National Aged Care Advisory Council (NACAC)

Communiqué – 21 June 2024

New Aged Care Act: Council welcomed the release of the consultation feedback report on the Exposure Draft. The Department of Health and Aged Care is using this feedback received and is making revisions to the Exposure Draft before the Bill is introduced to Parliament. Council highlighted the need for other more appropriate service systems beyond aged care to provide supports for people under the age of 65, rather than using the aged care system as the default system of support. The department confirmed they are working with state and territory governments, as well as the Department of Social Services and the National Disability Insurance Agency, to progress approaches to this matter.

Evaluation framework for care minutes and 24/7 registered nursing: The department is working to develop a monitoring and evaluation framework for the care minutes and 24/7 registered nurse measures. Once finalised, the framework will enable the department to conduct periodic in-house monitoring and provide the plan for a full evaluation of the measures in 2025-26, subject to government approval. Council emphasised the importance of including the perspectives of residents and their families, as well as workers' voices, in the framework. Using appropriate and accurate evidence and data is critical, as well as ensuring that the right outcomes are used to assess the measures.

National Principles and Guidelines - Accommodation Design: Council was pleased to see that its earlier feedback is reflected in the Principles and Guidelines. The department has been working with older people, the aged care sector and design experts to improve the design of residential aged care accommodation. Subject to Ministerial endorsement, the Principles and Guidelines will be launched on 1 July 2024. Council discussed how best to promote and monitor adoption of the Principles and Guidelines by the sector. Members supported the non-mandatory approach to adoption and cautioned against moving rapidly to a regulatory approach, noting some of the challenges, for example in retrofitting and the lead-time for new builds. Council advised that building design, clinical model of care and the staffing model all need to be considered in conjunction. The needs of those with advanced dementia need to be considered in developing residential design models into the future.

Commonwealth COVID-19 Inquiry: Council welcomed the opportunity for a further discussion with COVID-19 Inquiry Panel Chair, Ms Robyn Kruk AO, and Panel Member, Epidemiologist, Professor Catherine Bennett, who are conducting the independent inquiry into Australia's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Council advised that the pandemic highlighted the critical importance of clear and consistent clinical guidance as well as accurate and current data. A more prescriptive, national approach should be developed, including an escalation pathway for decision-making. Workforce planning is critical and centralised control of workforce should be considered in future events. Members discussed the potential benefits of mobile responses, including field hospitals and deployment of the Australian Defence Force.

Members reflected on the importance of tailored engagement with First Nations communities and culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The needs of particularly vulnerable people, such as those with dementia, should be better recognised and managed. Involvement of their family and care partners needs to be supported. Preparedness for future events must consider connectedness plans for residents.

Members suggested there needs to be a system in place to ensure that residents in palliative care can have family members or carers with them when they pass. Given the continuing "long tail" of the pandemic, members advocated that visitors should be allowed in both residential care homes and hospitals during COVID-19 outbreaks.

The next Council meeting is scheduled for Wednesday 7 August 2024.