



# Council of Elders

## Meeting Communique – 5 & 6 February 2025

### Council introductions

Council convened its first meeting of the year on 5 and 6 February 2025, welcoming four new members who bring with them a range of experiences and expertise.

Council reaffirmed its commitment to improving services for older people by providing independent advice to government, representing the views of communities, actively engaging with networks, and facilitating the implementation of reforms.

### Aged Care Reform and Implementation Overview

Council met with the new Aged Care Deputy Secretary, Sonja Stewart, who reiterated her commitment to implementation of the Aged Care Act from 1 July 2025. Her comments on looking more broadly at the issue of ageing-well and the importance of social connectivity for older Australians resonated with the views of Council members.

Council welcomed the establishment of the Aged Care Transition Taskforce to provide oversight and stewardship of the reforms to the aged care system included in the new Aged Care Act 2024, ahead of its commencement on 1 July 2025.

### Aged Care Act

Council members discussed the progress of draft Aged Care Act 2024 Rules, noting that language used in the Act may be difficult to understand for some readers, in particular older Australians. For example, terms such as grandfathering and concepts such as hardship provisions, home modifications and fees and contributions, can be complex or jargonistic.

Council emphasised the need for clear, accessible information, tailored to specific audiences, including fact sheets, webinars and videos available through a variety of channels as well as hard copy and library resources.

### My Aged Care

Members noted the many improvements to date to the My Aged Care website but discussed some issues that continue to be a difficulty for end-users. Members discussed a recurring theme for many older Australians is they often don't understand or cannot easily ascertain where they are in the system and they are not necessarily comfortable with traversing complex websites like My Aged Care. Council noted that communication materials that clearly and simply outline steps and provide contact phone numbers to relevant support are a priority to help older Australians navigate the website more effectively.

### Department's regional role

Council appreciated meeting Regional State Managers of the Department of Health and Aged Care's Local Network. Council members noted the opportunity provided for teams within the Network to move to a model of locally-engaged system stewardship by establishing stronger local engagement.

Council members are keen to establish regular meetings between themselves and Local Network officials in their respective jurisdiction noting this could facilitate further engagement and traction in relation to local issues and concerns.

### **Market and Workforce**

Council members welcome the increase in workforce numbers, improvements in staff wages and the positive change in worker satisfaction and workplace culture reflected in recent aged care worker surveys. Council members noted there needs to be an ongoing focus in this area to ensure that working in aged care is seen as a valued and worthwhile career choice.

### **Interim First Nations Aged Care Commissioner**

Council was briefed by the Interim First Nations Aged Care Commissioner and discussed her report “*Transforming Aged Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*”. Members plan to read the report and have an in-depth discussion at their next meeting.

### **Next meeting**

The next meeting of the Council of Elders is scheduled for 19 and 20 March 2025.