



Communique 27 & 28 November 2024

The Hon Anika Wells MP, Minister for Aged Care and Minister for Sport – Council members were delighted to meet with Minister Wells at Parliament House and reiterated the privilege of being able to provide advice throughout the aged care reform process, culminating in the successful passage of the Aged Care Bill 2024. Members look forward to the Bill receiving Royal Assent and the commencement of the new Aged Care Act on 1 July 2025. They view this milestone as the beginning of significant reform and are eager to share this progress with their networks and communities. Council expressed strong support for the removal of caps on cleaning and gardening services in the service list, thanking the Minister for taking this feedback into account.

Reform Progress and Priorities – Council welcomed the announcement of the Transition Taskforce which was established to address the practical aspects of implementation of the Aged Care Bill 2024. Looking beyond implementation, Council highlighted the importance of a long-term perspective on aged care reform priorities and welcomed the opportunity to be consulted in 2025 to ensure reforms continue to improve the lives of older Australians.

Aged Care Bill 2024 – The passage of the Aged Care Bill on 25 November 2024 was warmly welcomed and Council congratulated the Government and Departmental officers for their efforts. Council appreciated the briefing on key amendments and the clarity provided on hardship provisions, as financial accessibility for home care remains of concern. Members emphasised the importance of clear public messaging on the "no worse off" provisions, as this remains a point of confusion for many. Council was pleased that the caps on cleaning and gardening services were removed, a change they had advocated for. Members are eager to contribute to consultations on the remaining tranches of the Rules.

Insights from Events and Engagements – Council members continue to be actively engaged at community events. Key themes raised include waiting times for assessments, service delivery, dementia support, digital literacy and gaps in palliative care.

Support at Home—Council provided suggestions on effective communication strategies to support the transition to the Support at Home program. Members emphasised the importance of clear, concise fact sheets available in multiple languages, culturally appropriate formats, and accessible channels such as radio and television. Council highlighted the need for tailored materials for current aged care recipients, those new to the system and addressing confusion among CHSP participants. Council offered to review materials for readability and accuracy and assist in the distribution of this information.

Contributions Reform – Members stressed the importance of clarity regarding new contribution requirements, particularly for those not covered by "grandfathering" provisions, recommending easy to use testing calculators and varied scenarios to ensure older Australians can easily understand what it will mean for their personal circumstances. Council also expressed interest in reviewing the details of hardship provisions to ensure they provide an adequate safety net.

Elder Abuse Update – Council welcomed an update from the Attorney-General's Department on elder abuse initiatives and highlighted key areas for further research, particularly in culturally informed approaches for First Nations communities and addressing cyber abuse and scams targeting older Australians. Members supported the consultation for the new National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians and emphasised the importance of a tailored response and consistency across jurisdictions (such as States and Territories) in legal protections.

Communications: Transitioning to the New Aged Care Act – Council provided feedback on engaging with older Australians about changes under the new Act and highlighted the need to emphasise the rights-based focus. Members noted the importance of clear, health-literate communication materials and messaging, including simple fact sheets for various audiences, and that it would be appropriate to incorporate practical tools, such as "one-pagers" and printed statements of rights, to support older Australians in understanding their entitlements and options under the new Act.

The next meeting of the Council of Elders will be held in February 2025.