

The Council of Elders

A voice for older Australians in the aged care reforms and ageing generally

Communiqué – 18 February 2022

Since the inaugural meeting in January, the Council's establishment has gained good momentum with members engaging in a range of out-of-session discussions and six members attending the recent National Elder Abuse Conference in Hobart.

This meeting began with a briefing from Rear Admiral Robert Plath regarding the Australian Defence Force (ADF) support being provided to ease the impacts felt by the aged care workforce due to the latest wave of COVID 19 cases. The Council noted that the ADF support had been requested by the sector, directed by government, and working with the Department of Health.

Council members were given the opportunity to clarify what this support means for senior Australians in aged care facilities and raise concerns. Of most concern was the potentially threatening perception of a military uniform for some residents. Members gave a range of examples of lived experience for individuals and generations that may result in a trauma response to having uniformed individuals entering their homes. Rear Admiral Plath acknowledged this risk as one they are always cognisant of and try to mitigate as much as possible.

In the context of the aged care workforce support, Rear Admiral Plath said the ADF teams are only providing support where they have been requested to do so, based on the aged care facilities' judgement of the individuals for whom they care. While recognising the genuine support and good intentions of the ADF, members still had concerns about the impact on residents from particular backgrounds and experiences. They suggested that the ADF consider a new variation of their uniform which could be used for such civilian missions. A letter will be sent by the Council capturing this suggestion for the ADF's consideration, requesting a formal response.

Members discussed the new advice from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) on managing public health restrictions and visitation in residential aged care. Members noted that under the new visitation guidelines residents will have greater access to visitors and reduced lockdowns. However, Council members raised concerns that the guidelines are not applied consistently across facilities and need to be followed by the States. Members commented that issues around visitation apply just as equally to people at home as they do in residential care and the importance of access to visitors.

The Council continued discussion on how it will most meaningfully fulfil its role. Members agreed to the Terms of Reference and discussed how they would like to approach communicating with the public about Council discussion and activities. The Department

provided an outline of how they intend to support the Council with the various types of community engagement they may choose to utilise.

Members also brainstormed ways to meaningfully engage with senior Australians – using their existing networks and leveraging their personal profiles where appropriate to consult widely and provide comprehensive advice in future discussions. Members agreed to discuss this further at the next meeting.

Dr Nick Hartland, First Assistant Secretary, Home and Residential Division, provided the Council with a briefing on the proposed Support at Home Program. Council members voiced various concerns and asked that the following be considered in the program design:

- Anxiety experienced by senior Australians and their families when assessments are conducted.
- Funding for one-off purchases of expensive items of equipment, e.g., a chair lift for a bedroom so a support person can assist a person in and out of bed.
- Capability in the new payment system to verify that services were provided.
- How reablement/restorative care is going to be assessed/defined to ensure it is consistent with current thinking and attitudes towards ageing.
- The need for family or important others to be part of any reablement focused assessment process.
- How self-managed packages will be paid to ensure they are easier to self-manage.
- Issues elderly people may have using technology.

Members also discussed some of the current issues between access to the National Disability Insurance Scheme and aged care services, noting the inconsistencies across the disability and aged care systems. They highlighted the many challenges to service delivery for indigenous remote and very remote areas and the importance of appropriate consultation to explore and address these.

Overall, the need for further consultation with the Council on the Support at Home Program was raised to ensure members are kept up to date and able to provide advice as the detail of this program is developed and tested.

In the interest of continuing to build momentum and facilitate improved connection amongst the group, members asked the Chair and Secretariat to discuss opportunities to meet face to face as soon as possible.

The Council's next meeting will be on Monday 21 March 2022.