

The Council of Elders – A voice for older Australians in the aged care reforms and ageing communiqué – 21 March 2022

The Council of Elders third meeting provided an opportunity to engage on the progress of key reforms such as the new Aged Care Act and discuss the development of the Council's forward work plan.

The Department of Health (the Department) provided an overview of the implementation planning for the Government's 5 pillars over 5 years aged care reform package. Members discussed the key activities underway to support the delivery of the reforms and agreed these will help inform a Forward Workplan, which will prioritise the items they want brought to future meetings for discussion. The Forward Workplan will be developed at the next meeting.

The Department also provided an update on planned communication and engagement activities for aged care reforms. Members provided their views on the kinds of channels to utilise, recognising that digital channels are not always the most effective for engaging with some older Australians and a variety of channels must be used, including the mainstream media, CALD focused media, larger town hall type consultations, community clubs and churches, retirement villages and similar settings.

Members are keen to raise awareness of aged care reforms across communities, and are seeking strong consultation and communication with First Nations people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, LGBTIQ communities and people with disability.

Members were provided with an overview of workforce measures by the Department, including initiatives intended to improve capacity of aged care workers and change the culture of the sector. Members suggested a range of mechanisms to address workforce issues, including capacity building, continuous education and training, and the role of management in defining workplace culture and development of career pathways. An increase in remuneration for aged care workers was strongly supported.

Members expressed concern about the need to better engage with and utilise the allied health workforce, which plays a critical role in reablement and supporting older Australians to stay in their homes safely, as well as the need to ensure their training equips and encourages them to work in a community setting. The need to enhance support measures for volunteers was also noted.

The Department provided an overview of the development of the new Aged Care Act, which will enshrine the rights of older Australians and emphasise rights and protections for senior Australians in their journey through the system. Members expressed their desire to be actively engaged in the development of the new Act.

Members who attended the National Elder Abuse Conference held 14-15 February 2022 in Hobart, Tasmania, shared their observations and insights. Members noted that the conference canvassed some interesting ideas and initiatives, including innovative approaches, awareness and training programs adopted by the Kimberly Group, Elder Abuse Action Australia (EAAA) and Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN). Of note is the [Compass website](#), which provides resources for tackling elder abuse.

Members also noted that, amidst advocacy efforts by EAAA and OPAN, older Australians continue to experience abuse, including financial, legal, emotional, physical or neglect, with many victims unable to easily access help or unwilling to engage with support services, often because the abuser is a family member or friend.

The Council will next meet in person in Canberra on 27 April 2022, for a full day.

More information on the Council of Elders can be found on the Department of Health website.