

ISSUES PAPER

CARE FOR OLDER PEOPLE IN SOUTHERN NSW



The number of Australians in need of aged care services is increasing. By 2061, one quarter of the population in NSW is projected to be aged 65 and over.¹ In Southern NSW, the percentage of community members over the age of 65 is currently 5% higher than the state average, and this is predicted to increase to 25.4% of the population by 2026.² Australia's aged care workforce will need to increase by 70% by 2050 in order to meet the needs of our aging population.³

The Australian aged care system is currently undergoing significant reform as government and providers work to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.

The issues highlighted by the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety include:

- Difficulty accessing and navigating the system, including the lack of "shop-front" or face-to-face support for using the My Aged Care system.
- Lack of detailed information about service providers and their ratings being made available to older people via My Aged Care so that they are able to make their informed choices about their care.
- Wait times of up to 12 months to access Home Care Packages (HCP) at the assessed level for HCP Levels 2-4. This increases pressure on Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) places and means older people aren't receiving the level of support they need.
- The disconnection between aged care, primary and allied health professionals in the care of older people (including mental health supports).
- A "one size fits all approach" to service provision for older people, which particularly disadvantages individuals from diverse backgrounds.
- Inequitable access to the NDIS for some older people with a disability.
- No formal recognition of the voice of the consumer within the aged care system.



In addition to extensive reforms, there are a number of other challenges facing the sector. Health Care and Social Assistance is a major area of employment in the Illawarra/South Coast (14.7%)⁴, however, recruiting and maintaining the workforce to support the increase in demand is an ongoing struggle for providers. Despite high levels of job satisfaction and pride in their industry, poor pay and high stress have been identified as the primary reasons for staff turnover in the sector.^{5,6}

Older people and aged care providers in regional, rural and remote parts of the country also face limited infrastructure, reduced access to allied health and specialist services, greater travel times and lack of public transport options.³

Operating in the context of the COVID-19 Pandemic has compounded pressures for the Aged Care sector, creating increased workload and emotional stress on the workforce, and high levels of vulnerability and social isolation for consumers.⁷

The Australian Government has announced a 17.7 billion dollar investment and Aged Care Reform Plan to strengthen the sector across five pillars including home care, residential aged care services and sustainability, residential aged care quality and safety, workforce and governance.

To view the snapshot, visit <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/five-pillars-over-5-years>.

References:

1. 2021 NSW Treasury, 2021-22 NSW Intergenerational Report
2. 2021 SENSW PHN Population Health Profile
3. 2021 Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety Final Report: Care, Dignity and Respect
4. 2021 ABS Labour Force Survey, May 2021 Quarter
5. 2021 CompliSpace Aged Care Workforce Report
6. 2021 HESTA State of the Sector Report
7. 2020 Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, Aged care and COVID-19: a special report

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Implementation of a funding model which enables improved wages and conditions for aged care workers.
- Implementation of a consolidated workforce attraction and retention strategy.
- Increased collaboration and communication between aged care, primary and allied health providers.
- Additional support for Aged Care Providers (particularly smaller providers) to adapt and implement reforms.
- Investment in sector support and development for all providers of aged care to ensure compliance with regulatory changes, and to promote leading practice in the provision of care for older people.
- Additional support for First Nations people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to navigate the aged care system, and access to culturally safe and appropriate services.
- Greater access to specialist services (including dementia and mental health supports) for older people, particularly in regional, rural and remote regions.
- Ongoing workforce development and training in key areas including cultural awareness, psychological first aid, and managing symptoms of dementia.
- Additional supports for informal carers.