



AGEDCARE

WORKFORCE INDUSTRY COUNCIL

RESPONSE TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO AGED CARE SPECIAL REPORT ON COVID-19

The Aged Care Workforce Industry Council supports the special report of the Royal Commission on Aged Care and COVID-19.

The recommendations from the Royal Commission complement the ongoing workforce reform that the Council is driving through collaboration with the aged care sector and Government.

The Council is committed to creating a better, more sustainable aged care system across Australia with a clear focus on the consumer. It is working with Industry, Government, workers and consumers to ensure the workforce is suitably skilled and able to deliver safe, consistent and high-quality care services to older Australians, irrespective of setting. The blueprint for this reform is *A Matter of Care*, the [National Aged Care Workforce Strategy](#) (the Strategy). This Strategy sets out 14 strategic actions and over 90 recommendations which map a clear way forward for us to create a world class aged care system, conforming to high quality standards consistent across the whole of Australia.

COVID-19 is a public health crisis that has disproportionately affected older people and aged care worldwide. Australia has been part of that tragedy. The Council acknowledges the incredible commitment and dedication of the aged care workforce across Australia. They have been most visibly affected by COVID-19, providing much-needed care and support to older Australians in very difficult circumstances.

The Council notes that recommendation two in the Royal Commission's report will reduce the concern and stress that many aged care workers have felt when trying to meet the additional workload to implement COVID-19 safeguards. The older Australians in their care are consistently listed as the reason aged care workers get up and go to work every day. Both workers and providers are mindful of the need for aged care services to provide holistic care to older people to ensure not only their physical but also their mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing. Visits from family and friends are an important aspect of this.

The Council has been working with the Commonwealth Department of Health to strengthen the interface between aged care and primary and acute care. Strategic action nine in the Strategy, aims to improve older Australians' access to

quality primary health care, including: general practitioners, allied health professionals, specialist medical, dental and after-hours.

A coordinated national approach to improve health service delivery across aged, primary and acute care to older Australians is required beyond a pandemic situation. Under the workforce strategy, the Department of Health is going to establish a ministerial dialogue between state and federal ministers to improve this coordination. The Council looks forward to this dialogue as a priority.

The Council supports the delivery of more MBS services in aged care, including whether an MBS item for home care and residential care services can be created. We have highlighted the need for this to be prioritised to the Department of Health over recent months. As such, we support recommendation three strongly and suggest that the Government prioritise a wider review of MBS items to support the role of general practitioners and allied health professionals in home care and residential care settings.

The Council endorses the process set out in the Royal Commission's recommendation four. It notes that COVID-19 has highlighted the difficulties associated with the transfer of older Australians from aged care into acute care and their discharge from it. This is a long stemming issue that has obstructed both hospitals and aged care services in providing appropriate transfer and information sharing between sectors. The Strategy recommends that the Government create specialised hospital roles to advise people on aged and health care services that will support them to manage their care on return to the community; and that the Government identify opportunities for discharge teams to be given more support and recognition in collaborating with aged care assessment teams to assist older Australians through the care system.

The training of aged care workers so that they can meet older Australians' needs is another aspect of the Council's work. The Royal Commission's recommendations five and six support the Council's work with the Aged Services Industry Reference Committee (IRC) and SkillsIQ to ensure aged care workers receive the qualifications, skills and competencies required to meet the needs of consumers. This includes establishing an accreditation processes (strategic actions three and four). When new roles and functions are introduced, it is imperative that aged care workers are given high quality training so that they can provide the best possible support and care for older people. Accreditation enables a national standard to be set so we can ensure workers are receiving the same standard of training. This in turn enables aged care organisations to ensure that older people across Australia are receiving consistent, high-level services.
