

Royal Commission into Aged Care: Adequacy of health care must be examined

MEDIA RELEASE WEDNESDAY 26 SEPTEMBER 2018

The Consumers Health Forum of Australia (CHF) has welcomed Prime Minister Morrison's announcement of a Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. Our response to the Government's consultation on the scope of the inquiry said that the adequacy and quality of health services in residential and community-based aged care settings needs to be examined.

"The incidents exposed in the recent ABC 4 Corners program are of grave concern. Older Australians and their families deserve better. It is timely to have a deep and comprehensive look at the quality of care provided to older Australians and the extent of sub-standard care" CEO of the Consumers Health Forum, Leanne Wells said.

"The focus should be across the full care spectrum including both residential and community and home-based care.

"Older Australians are healthcare consumers with the same rights to good health care as the rest of the community. Many live with multiple complex health care needs typically including one or more chronic conditions, depression and neurodegenerative conditions like dementia. It is critical that the adequacy of access to healthcare and wellness services in aged care settings is also examined.

"Residents have little chance of quality of life and ageing well if their health care needs are given scant regard. This is compounded with poor management of transitional care between aged care services and hospitals. We know this is where many distressing and costly adverse events can occur.

"The intersection of the NDIS and aged care systems must also be examined with a focus on where people are falling between the two systems as should future challenges and opportunities for delivering aged care services in the context of changing demographics, including in remote, rural and regional Australia.

"The trend in health and human service delivery is towards greater accountability and people-centred care. The Commission should examine the effectiveness and responsiveness of the complaints process. New research from National Seniors Australia shows 60 percent of older Australians have never heard of the Aged Care Complaints Commissioner and 65 percent feel there are no options to complain. This is of great concern and must be rectified" said Ms Wells.

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“How quality is measured, how a culture of continuous quality improvement can be strengthened and how a system for better public transparency and accountability can be put in place should also be in scope.

“The Commission should explore the role of patient advocates and future schemes to expand and promote their role in assisting older Australians to navigate the aged care system, to understand and take up avenues for complaints and to provide information on sub-standard care.”

As the Royal Commission runs its course, action to improve the standard and quality of aged care should not halt. We would expect an ambitious reform agenda and serious investment in improving the system to flow from the Commission’s findings. In the meantime, CHF supports calls by COTA today for urgent action to continue to occur.

We particularly support COTA’s call for:

- Funding in the MYEFO or 2019 Budget for 30,000 more high level Home Care Packages. This will give older Australians real choice and better opportunity to “age in place”
- Compulsory publication of aged care services, staffing levels, price and quality performance by mid-2019 so consumers have information and transparency about which service is right for them
- More funding to build the capacity of the aged care workforce to deliver high quality care which should also include compulsory training in person-centred care
- All quality inspections of aged care providers to be totally unannounced at least once in a year for all, with extra targeted inspections for at-risk providers. This should also involve inspectors speaking with a higher percentage of residents and families about the care they receive, and that people can speak with the team after the visit without the provider necessarily knowing they are going to have that conversation.

ENDS

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