

Aged care blueprint demands urgent action

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Australia has been given a powerful blueprint for a sweeping overhaul of aged care that must convince the Federal Government of the need for comprehensive and urgent change, the Consumers Health Forum said today.

The proposed recommendations of the Counsel Assisting the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety has set out a persuasive case for a comprehensive set of changes including legislation that would establish an Independent Aged Care Commission separate from the Health Department.

“While the Royal Commission is still to deliver its final report, the detailed and fundamental changes proposed by the Counsel Assisting the Commission should be more than sufficient for the Government to be preparing for reforms as soon as possible,” the CEO of the Consumers Health Forum, Leanne Wells, said.

“After the many previous calls for change over many decades there is now no excuse for delay given the terrible evidence of neglect and squalor about aged care that we have heard.

“A new Aged Care Act needs to be developed with significant input from older people, their families and carers.

“A new Act and Commission will only deliver better quality and safety if there are real legislated sanctions for providers who do not do the right thing.

“It’s got to have real teeth. The new Commission will need to be resourced to do more site visits and inspections. Such sanctions need to impose

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penalties that will act as a deterrent to bad behaviour and encourage all providers to provide better care.

“This will also require States and Territories to work with the Commonwealth to have a system in place to find alternate care for residents if the sanction of closing a facility down is put in place. One of the problems has been a reluctance to enact this ultimate sanction as the residents would lose their home.

“It is clear there needs to be more attention paid to workforce in aged care. There needs to be a more appropriate staff mix, better skilled staff and staff need to be paid at levels that attract people into the sector and keep them working there.

“The recommendations on initiatives to move younger people out of residential aged care and ensure in future they do not have that as their only option for care are well overdue and welcomed.

“We particularly welcome the requirement that six-monthly reports on progress on this initiative are presented to Parliament.

“It is also clear that more attention needs to be paid to better integrate the aged care system with health services to improve access to care and to avoid healthcare related misadventure. The measures to improve access to primary health care are good and the idea of an accredited aged care general practice is one that has merit.

“It is important that it maintain the choice of doctor or practice for the older person and that they can remain with a non-accredited practice if they choose to do that.

“We also support all the recommendations for better medication management, particularly the notion of an embedded pharmacist working closely with the aged care service provider,” Ms Wells said.

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