

Fixing aged care for a civilised society

MEDIA RELEASE MONDAY, 30 NOVEMBER 2020

If Australia is to meet standards of a civilised society, older people who need support should have universal access to care, the Consumers Health Forum said today.

The latest report from the Grattan Institute on aged care joins a lengthening list of authoritative inquiries, highlighting the urgent need for an overhaul of aged care, given the current system so often fails to provide basic standards of care.

“The Grattan Institute report makes a persuasive case that the system is “broken” and needs a fundamental reset, including substantially more funding than present,” the spokesman for CHF, Mark Metherell, said.

“On virtually any measure the current aged care system fails: in terms of care standards, staffing, access, cost, accountability and transparency.

“The system has been proclaimed to be “consumer directed” and “market-based”. It is neither, too often failing to provide prospective residents with real informed choice of services in a system that is complex and uncertain and that often leaves residents languishing in substandard cloisters.”

The Grattan report, *Reforming aged care: a practical plan for a rights-based system*, is written by Stephen Duckett, Anika Stobart and Hal Swerissen,

The Consumers Health Forum supports three key recommendations of the report:

Contact: Mark Metherell, 0429 111 986

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- That older Australians who need support should have universal access to care. A new funding model should require that reasonable and necessary funding matches a person's individual care needs, documented in individual support plans, which are portable between settings, covering what care they should receive.
- Older Australians should have face-to-face help to obtain a range of high-quality service options. Rather than a poorly regulated and fragmented system based in Canberra, 30 regionally-based 'system managers' across the country should be made responsible for the care of older Australians in a defined geographic area. CHF recommends that these regionally-based entities should be centred within existing Primary Health Network districts which boost the potential for integrated and coordinated care in the community for older people.
- Regional system managers and their community representative committees should enhance the independence of older people through social participation programs, promoting healthy ageing, and better integrating the aged care system with health care.

"As the report states, the current aged care system is so broken that these measures alone won't fix it. Nothing will improve unless the federal government spends more on aged care.

"The report estimates the proposed changes will cost the government an additional \$7 billion per year – a 35 per cent increase on current expenditure. It says even more will be needed as the population continues to age. Care will only improve if carers are adequately supported.

"This is a lot of money but less than five per cent of Australians' total public and private spending on health, and a bearable cost if we are to assure our older people of the care they need," Mr Metherell said.

Contact: Mark Metherell, 0429 111 986

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PO Box 73
Deakin West ACT 2600

Ph: (02) 6273 5444
Fax: (02) 6273 5888

www.chf.org.au