

Allied health central to quality of life for seniors

THE VALUE OF allied health services in supporting people as they age is well established, particularly for those with chronic and complex health and care needs.

Indeed, access to allied health services is critical to ensure people's health and wellbeing is optimised as they approach their later years – particularly in terms of preventative health, reducing complications and maximising capacity of older people to live their lives to the fullest.

As such, their contribution extends beyond the impact on the individual to include benefits for health and care services more generally through reducing service gaps, addressing waitlists and, importantly, potentially reducing the need for premature admission to residential care.

Despite the weight of evidence to support its benefits, consideration of allied health within the broader policy context has lagged behind



Anita Westera, president of the AAG

health heavyweights medicine, nursing and pharmacy, primarily due to a mix of historical and financial factors.

The AAG has been seeking to address this policy gap through our representations to government and more broadly within the aged care sector through our role on the national steering committee of the National Aged Care Alliance.

Recent consultations with our members highlight continued concerns regarding a lack of uptake of skilled allied

health professionals within the aged care workforce.

Five years on from our Position Paper: Aged care workforce, funding and governance, we still need more allied health services across the aged care system. We still require more allied health professionals included in interdisciplinary integrated aged care needs assessment services and workforce planning, and a skills-mix approach that incorporates equitable access to clinical and social care including allied health practitioners with gerontological skills.

All are necessary to meet the needs of older people and maximise quality of life and wellbeing.

We also support a recent call by the Australian Council of Deans of Health Sciences for the development of, and support for, the rural and remote allied health workforce in Australia.

We also back the Royal

Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety's call for the professionalisation of the aged care workforce.

The aged care workforce requires a harmonisation of qualifications to reduce the plethora of unregistered, unregulated, and largely variable base qualifications. Regulation would standardise qualifications, elevate role dignity and enhance career appeal.

Despite a recent focus on the preventative capacity of allied health, particularly within the context of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, significant gaps in service availability and costs of allied health for older people continue.

Allied health professionals must be appropriately considered within the broader policy context to support equitable, accessible and sustainable provision of allied health for every older Australian. ●

