

## Australia needs a national conversation on ageing

THE AGED CARE reform process is at a critical point to secure its future in this country. The Federal Government is considering a number of significant inputs through inquiries, studies and taskforces that will further drive aged care reform, with links to the budget process.

We are seeking a proactive and pragmatic approach to driving sector reform, performance and sustainability. This approach must be collaborative across the industry and bi-partisan within the Parliament.

This is too important not to get right. We must seize this opportunity to build on the achievements of the reforms to date, while addressing identified and emerging issues for consumers, providers and governments.

Getting this right, and doing it as quickly as possible, will ensure a fit-for-purpose aged care system able to meet the needs of the growing number of older Australians for decades to come.

We already have an Aged Care Roadmap developed by the Aged Care Sector Committee but we also need a wider national conversation on ageing in Australia. A conversation that will explore and express the needs and aspirations of older Australians, and how to ensure that the aged care system is capable of providing accessible, affordable, quality care and support for them.

Although our aged care system compares well with most other countries, there is more work to do with regards to ensuring better access to services. This includes supporting consumers to better understand the aged care system and further assist them in making informed choices across available services and providers.

A world-class system must be adequately funded and policy settings put in place to allow a consumer-directed care approach to operate freely in the market with appropriate safety nets to



Sean Rooney, CEO of LASA

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cater for special needs groups.

There is much work to be done to ensure a sustainable aged care sector that represents the values of a fair, just and caring society that values and supports older Australians. To achieve this, our whole community will need to be involved. A wholesale shift in attitudes is required to develop an age-friendly society, in addition to a high performing aged care system.

I commend Australia’s aged care providers, the overwhelming majority of which are delivering world-class care underpinned by a highly professional and dedicated workforce, and the industry for its commitment to engaging with the ongoing reform process and seeking continuous improvement.

Together with government and support from the wider community, the industry is determined to ensure that accessible, affordable, quality care and services are available to all older Australians. ■

## Improving the experience of aged care

THE 50TH AAG conference was held in Perth in November 2017 and covered a range of key topics relevant to the residential aged care sector.

A highlight was the opening plenary session which focused on myths about, and issues for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders.

Feedback from many participants showed that the message of respect and inclusivity for Aboriginal attendees was welcomed by all conference attendees.

We all need to embrace diversity in the aged care sector if we are going to help our older Australians have good quality of life as they age.

Mark Elliot, chair of AAG’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory group, highlighted the need for more culturally safe indigenous services

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to meet the needs of the growing number of older Aboriginal Australians.

Supporting diversity as a key theme was also highlighted through presentations about LGBTI and CALD services. Ken Wyatt, who is Minister for Aged Care and Indigenous Health, delivered an engaging



Associate Professor Christine Stirling, president of the AAG

opening plenary highlighting how recent policy directions support diversity.

The Department of Health has been working on co-designing an Aged Care Diversity Framework, which was released in December. We should all keep an eye out for the release of the subsequent action plans

for specific diverse groups including older indigenous Australians, which will provide further important direction for our services.

Another important theme raised at the conference was the need for acute services, researchers, and educational organisations to acknowledge that older people make up the majority of health service clients, and that their health issues are often highly complex.

Older Australians requiring health services are likely to have more than one illness and this makes their needs and treatments more complex.

This is something that needs to be brought to the forefront in education and research if we are to improve the experience of ageing. ■

