

## Creating opportunity out of the royal commission

LAST ISSUE I critiqued ABC media coverage of aged care neglect and abuse, not for exposing problems but for not being prepared to engage in genuinely seeking out and airing solutions, like COTA's Keep fixing aged care five-point package.

As it turned out, while for-profit providers were targeted by critics, *Four Corners* found problems across all types of providers. Nurse ratios were also a loudly posited solution, but *Four Corners* found nurses committed abuse and neglect. It argued a royal commission would be the silver bullet – but the Prime Minister had decided in advance to have it anyway.

I was cautious about a royal commission because I worried about it taking resources and momentum from reforms already in train or agreed. Prime Minister Scott Morrison has promised that won't happen. We will hold him to account on that

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because it's not just about intent, the department will need more resources to manage both.

On the plus side, a royal commission gives the aged care sector a public profile it's never had before. To me that spells opportunity.

Here is the chance to tell our story on the national stage over a period of time, to spell out how and why aged care has always struggled to get priority in



Ian Yates, chief executive of COTA Australia

public policy reform with Living Longer Living Better compared to the National Disability Insurance Scheme just one example. This is the opportunity to set a path toward a mature, open and well-resourced consumer-controlled care system.

Yet I hear providers talking about moving into full blown defensive mode – setting up “war rooms” and engaging legal teams

like in the banking royal commission.

While some legal advice may be prudent for providers who know they have had quality and safety issues, that is not where I would start. I would start with describing your vision for high quality aged care, the pathway for getting there, and the requirements for achieving it, including what your organisation can contribute.

As I am regularly advising providers, the future lies in transparency combined with consumer engagement, partnership and co-design. Getting on the front foot on these doesn't need to wait for the royal commission's outcomes.

It's about getting ahead of the pack and demonstrating the way forward, which commission recommendations on structural and financing reform can endorse and underpin, and consumers will embrace. ■

## Education for shared decision making

THERE HAS been a lot of news generated about aged care services over recent months culminating in the calling of a Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.

These negative headlines have provided the opportunity for change.

The issue of adequate staffing is front and centre and includes both staff ratios and the skill set of aged care workers.

One key initiative that may create a proactive process is the review of the career pathways and qualifications and skills frameworks recommended by the Aged Care Workforce Strategy.

This work will be undertaken by the Aged Services Industry Reference Committee, which will need to consider not just today's needs but future needs as well.

We know that palliative



Associate Professor Christine Stirling, president of the AAG

care, dementia care and reablement have been identified as key skill needs for the aged care workforce if we are to deliver high-quality services.

Research has shown that the right kind of advanced care planning can improve end of life care for older people but that this is often not achieved.

We are also improving

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our knowledge of how to minimise or manage behaviours of concern that people with dementia may experience.

Translating this knowledge into practice through the education of aged service workers can help to transform care.

The biggest gains though will come by moving to a framework

that is underpinned by the preferences and values of the older person.

Communication is the key skill required for a shift towards respect, listening and share decision making.

Teaching staff to hold conversations about dying, for example, is an important step towards ensuring we translate knowledge about advanced care planning into practice.

Education frameworks that ensure all workers and professionals place the older person at the centre of decision making will allow services to organise around a life journey approach providing reablement, supportive care, and a good death in the right place and at the right time. ■

