

## Leadership is listening

A ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME call for change is booming through our nation.

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety's interim report is giving a voice to older Australians and their families – one that must be heard in every corner of our country.

The appalling failures documented in the report are unacceptable, as are the inadequate policy settings, regulations and funding, which are way out of step with the needs and expectations of older Australians and the broader community.

How we care for our elders speaks to who we are as a nation.

The message is clear: Much of the evidence heard by the royal commission is shameful in the 21st century Australia.

We all need to do better and we must work together to do our best.

Notwithstanding some examples of outstanding care and innovation, the report calls into question the

character, competency and culture of some individuals and organisations in our sector.

These are fundamental failings and we as a sector are accountable for them and responsible for fixing them.

We are steadfast in our commitment to older Australians to do better overall and to hold to account any individual or organisation that is either unwilling or unable to meet industry standards and community expectations.

The report emphasises the importance of leadership at all levels, to ensure we have a safe, high-quality and high-performing aged care system.

With submissions open until April 2020, the royal commissioners have specifically asked the aged care sector and other stakeholder groups to workshop ideas in every way possible and to put forward solutions.

This means acting to be part of the solution, not reacting as a part of the problem.



Sean Rooney, CEO of LASA

The expectation is on all aged care providers to read the report in detail, reflect on their operations and work together with staff, families and communities on better ageing futures.

What do people really want in their local area? How can we achieve this together? What sort of support do we need to get there?

These conversations will contribute to the bigger picture:

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- respect and quality care for older Australians as and when they need this
- reducing ageism and elder abuse across our entire society
- realising more fulfilling, age-friendly communities.

The royal commissioners want to hear our collective voices. Aged care providers are key participants on our journey to realise a better aged care system for the nation.

True leadership begins with listening. ■

## A focus on human rights and reform

THE 52ND AUSTRALIAN Association of Gerontology Conference in Sydney in early November was as usual full of new research and debate. But this year two key themes of human rights and reform emerged from the keynote speakers.

These were timely given the recent release of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety Interim Report titled *Neglect* and that human rights is an important aspect of the AAG 2020 Hot Topic.

Baroness Sally Greengross (UK), Professor Andrew Byrnes (Australia) and Margaret Gillis (Canada) all spoke of the need to apply a human rights framework to aged care, and that using policy mechanisms such as a UN Convention of Human Rights does demonstrably provide positive results.

Professor Byrnes noted that Australia's *Aged Care Act* does not even reference relevant legislation on human

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rights and that policy reforms should consider human rights implications as well as economic impacts.

Margaret Gillis highlighted the role of the Global Alliance on the Rights of Older Persons (GAROP) in advocating for a UN Convention on the Rights of Older People, and that membership is available to all interested in joining online.



Professor Christine Stirling, president of the AAG

Ashton Applewhite spoke strongly about fighting ageism.

The need for reform and a new economic framework for policies around aged care services was another major theme.

Professor Teppo Kroger outlined the policy shifts that have occurred over the last two decades in Finland and neighbouring Scandinavian countries.

These shifts from universalism to marketisation mirrored many of the shifts seen in Australia. But Professor Kroger's research suggests that the pendulum is swinging away from marketisation as a result of market failure in aged care services and voter disapproval of care poverty, or unmet needs.

Professor Kathy Eager then provided delegates with a detailed outline of the results of the Resource Utilisation and Classification Study.

She showed the high level of health care needs of the majority of aged care residents and also described the low levels of staffing compared to international benchmarks.

These pieces of evidence highlight a way forward for Australia and the aged care industry and may give aged care workers some hope for a brighter future. ■

