

## Focusing on the bigger picture

AGED CARE and older Australians – and those who care for and work with them – face challenges at every turn during this tumultuous time.

While vigilance is vital and we are focused on protecting our elders, we must not lose sight of the importance of the next 12 months, despite the threat of coronavirus.

The next year will help to determine the destiny of aged care in Australia.

While COVID-19 is testing our aged care providers, our staff and our system to the limit, the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety is due to report in February, after more than two years of intensive work.

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The royal commission's findings will go to the Federal Government, which

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will be compelled to – and is committed to – respond.

The government's actions in response to the royal commission's recommendations will, in a large part, determine the future of our sector and the services available for years to come.

This response will be a testament to the consideration and value we as a society place on our elders.



**Sean Rooney, CEO of Leading Age Services Australia**

As the prime minister said when announcing the royal commission, a key task will be to help build a national culture of respect for ageing and older Australians.

He reiterated that, if the nation cares about aged care, which those who work in the sector do, we will want it to be at its very best, and what matters most is

ensuring we have an aged care system that meets the needs of all older Australians requiring care and support. And that this system is high performing, respected and sustainable.

Therefore, what happens in the royal commission's final report, the Federal Budget in May 2022 and the potential legislation that is likely to be required, will herald the fundamental and transformational changes and improvements.

We as a nation must realise the system and the outcomes that we all want for older people and ourselves as we age.

To achieve this, we need the community to understand the importance of these changes and our sector to work together.

We also need to lead a groundswell of support that will ensure we deliver the best future for our ageing population. ■

## ‘It is vital we ensure the human rights of older people’

JULY WAS a terrible month for residential aged care facility residents and staff experiencing the brunt of a COVID-19 outbreak.

On behalf of AAG I would like to commend the work of frontline workers and service providers as they continue to deliver care while trying to stop the spread of coronavirus.

This outbreak though has drawn fresh attention to the need for reform. AAG has just released a position paper on aged care workforce, funding and governance, which addresses some of the key issues.

This series of position statements builds on years of AAG member forums, discussions, submissions and other papers, as well as a consideration of the work of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.

AAG believes the Federal Government has a responsibility to act as a system steward and ensure taxpayer-funded aged care



**Professor Christine Stirling, president of the AAG**

services are underpinned by evidence-based policy with a human-rights rather than a market-based foundation.

Aged care, health and social care should be available to all Australians and it needs to be better integrated. There is no doubt this pandemic crisis has highlighted the many funding and information barriers preventing this integration, and we call for focused effort to reduce these.

Aged care needs a strong

and better interface with healthcare services and this means better funding and systems to ensure the inclusion of health professionals – including registered nurses, nurse practitioners, general practitioners, geriatricians, allied health professionals, and other clinicians – to work with the experienced aged care staff.

Workforce issues cannot be resolved until there is improved workforce remuneration, employment conditions, career opportunities, leadership, and registration schemes for non-clinical staff, as well as ongoing skills, knowledge and competencies training for all aged care staff.

While most of these issues are already under the spotlight this pandemic crisis has shown the importance of policies and actions being effective and prompt.

Finally, I would like to stress that at this very difficult time it is vital that we don't speak of, or treat older

people as a homogenous group. To adopt a well-worn turn of phrase: if you meet one older person you have met one individual.

This means it is vital we ensure the human rights of older people are upheld throughout all COVID-19 responses including equitable care and autonomy – the right to choose.

We must also remember to involve older people, their families, and significant others in healthcare decisions, which includes foregrounding older people's needs, preferences and goals.

I believe most of you do indeed work from these principles as much as our systems allow and wish you all well as you cope during this very difficult time.

Access the position paper from [aag.asn.au/news-publications/policy-papers](http://aag.asn.au/news-publications/policy-papers) ■

