

Respect our aged care workers

THE COVID crisis has highlighted the essential role of all aged care workers.

Every day during this crisis aged care workers have turned up to do their job and provide a vital service, despite the underlying risk to their own health.

Aged care staff have risen to the ongoing challenge of being on the frontline of battling a highly infectious virus and dealing with the impacts of isolation on residents and clients.

It is the epitome of what makes working in our sector different from working in a factory.

We have the privilege of looking after people at what is often one of the most vulnerable times in their life and we have a duty of care.

The crisis has highlighted the impact of casualised and insecure work and the one worker one site policy has been introduced to mitigate this risk factor during times

of community transmission of COVID.

There should be pathways for more secure jobs for existing workers, which can only be achieved with the structural and financing reform we seek through the royal commission.

Beyond the pandemic, our aged care workforce is not only ageing, but many organisations have trouble filling vacancies, particularly during COVID-19.

Australia must nearly triple its current aged care workforce by 2050 to keep up with demand. This provides an opportunity to contribute to the country's economic recovery.

Analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics data by The Australia Institute found there are about 11 jobs created for every \$1 million invested in health care and social assistance, compared with about one job generated for every \$1 million invested in the mining sector.



Pat Sparrow, CEO of ACSA

“There should be pathways for more secure jobs for existing workers.”

It makes Government investment in a service-led recovery a clear priority. One option would be free

training for in-demand roles in aged care, and support for people returning to work after unpaid child or elder care responsibilities.

We also need investment in strengthening the skills of our existing workforce in managing pandemics including infection prevention and control.

I can't wait for the pandemic to be over.

I hope as we navigate our new normal that society retains respect for aged care workers over celebrities.

I hope the Government sees the possibility of a service-led economic recovery and follows through with significant investment.

I hope the royal commission makes far-reaching reform and financing recommendations that the Government accepts and actions so that providers can employ more staff in secure work, pay them well and give them career pathways. ■

Advances in COVID-19 Care

WE HAVE had a full six months now living with COVID-19 and it has led to a new normal.

Research has demonstrated its importance with the race for a vaccine and to understand the transmission and impacts of the virus.

I thought it would be timely to review some of the recent research evidence of relevance to the aged care sector.

Vaccines have been progressed at a very fast rate as researchers around the world collaborate.

There are currently nine phase 3 trials in the world with varying reports about their efficacy and timeliness and raised expectations about a vaccine being available sometime in 2021.

Understanding of the management of the acute phase of the illness has also increased with better outcomes resulting.



Professor Christine Stirling, president of the AAG

“Vaccines have been progressed at a very fast rate as researchers around the world collaborate.”

The *BMJ* has a specific site with good updates and clinical guidelines, with a treatment algorithm that allows clinicians to more easily apply best practice (bestpractice.bmj.com/topics/en-gb/3000201/treatment-algorithm).

As researchers increase their understanding of the disease these treatments are becoming more targeted for vulnerable individuals, with immunotherapy offering new insights.

COVID-19 has also shone a light on palliative and end of life care.

Our daily media has highlighted the distress that dying alone can cause to patients and families.

It has also highlighted the need for appropriate education of staff and conversations with older people.

There is already access to useful free online palliative care education materials in

Australia (pallcaretraining.com.au).

Advanced care directives are particularly valuable if illness strikes quickly, as is the capacity of staff to use and understand them.

But other aspects of the pandemic situation have required innovation.

People around the world have looked for innovative ways to link those in isolation with their family and friends. Using technology for connection and special shields that allow touch are two examples.

It is reassuring to see how quickly researchers, clinicians and other healthcare staff can come together in a crisis to bring the best care possible to us. ■

