

The National Report

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Aged & Community Services Australia



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Energy Efficient Age Care Homes

Minister Elliot has issued a media release urging 'eligible nursing home and hostel operators' to apply for solar hot water and insulation rebates under the Australian government's *Energy Efficient Homes* package. ACSA had advocated for such a move and to ensure the eligibility for residents of retirement villages but has yet to view the Guidelines governing this scheme. These are expected to be released on 26th February and will be available on www.environment.gov.au/energyefficiency or by calling 1800 808 571.

National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission Interim Report

The National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission's *Interim Report* was released on Monday 16 February.

The Report focuses on a system that provides comprehensive care for people over their lifetime with a focus on four themes: Taking Responsibility, Connecting Care, Facing Inequities and Driving Quality Performance.

Aged care forms a significant section of the report with an opening statement that aged care services need to be more responsive to the needs of older people by allowing more choice - which the current government regulatory framework does not support.

In order to increase flexibility and choice for older people in accessing services, the Report recommends that the restrictions on the number of aged care *places* be lifted and replaced with an allocation based on the number of *people* aged 85 and over needing care. The current ratio of places per thousand people over 70 years was set some decades ago when the life expectancy of older people was shorter and that by raising the age, the Report argues, it would more directly link funding to the care needs of older people. Lifting restrictions on the supply of aged care places, to promote choice, was a recommendation in the Hogan report.

The Report also raises the possibility of extending accommodation bonds or other alternative approaches as options for payment for accommodation for people entering high care. This recommendation is supported in the report on the condition that supply restrictions are lifted so as not to artificially boost prices.

The Commission strongly supports the consolidation of community aged care programs under the Commonwealth Government and the streamlining of assessment for eligibility for care, regardless of setting. The Report advocates the separation of payments for accommodation from care and models that give consumers more say in terms of the services they receive.

The Report certainly reflects the concerns of the industry around the rigidity caused by the current regulatory framework, which is causing lack of choice for consumers, and financial concerns for providers, but it will be some time before we see what parts of the Report will be actioned and what impact they will have on the provision of aged care services.

Other chapters in the Report examine subacute and rehabilitative care, palliative care, primary health care and financing of the system. All of these areas have reference to aged and community care.

The Report is available at www.nhhrc.org.au and responses are sought on the *Interim Report* by 16 March which will guide the Commission in finalising the Report, due in June 2009. Responses can be lodged at talkhealth@nhhrc.org.au.

ACSA CEO Greg Mundy commented that the Report underlined the need for some fresh thinking in aged care and indicated ACSA's support for this.

"We agree that services need to become more responsive to the needs of older people and that the existing government regulatory framework doesn't support this."

"There is no doubt that demand for aged care services, both for those living at home, and for those that need some form of residential care will increase. If we don't get aged care right, the consequences will be felt right through the health care system and by older people themselves."

"More flexibility, more choice and greater freedom for aged care providers to meet people's needs are things we have been arguing for some time."

“These will need to be coupled with more flexible ways of paying for services and a breakthrough on the vexed issue of paying for accommodation, whether this be through accommodation bonds, market related rental charges or a combination of the two.

Linking and connecting different parts of the services system is a challenge and the Commission is right to identify it as one of their six key messages in aged care.

“We will study the Report in detail and provide comment on the specific recommendations applying to aged and community care. There are some positive ideas for change in the Report but we will need to explore their implications, he concluded

Agendas Issue 50 Winter, 2009 will feature responses to the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission’s Interim Report from an aged and community care perspective. If any National Report reader would like to contribute their views to this analysis, they are invited to contact the editor, Megan Stoyles, at mstoyles@agedcare.org.au with either their comments, or to express their willingness to be interviewed on the subject.

Get Up, Stand Up! - ACSA 2009 National Conference: Perth 13-16 September - SHORT FILM FESTIVAL COMPETITION

ACSWA is hosting the National ACSA Conference at the Perth Convention Exhibition Centre from 13-16 September 2009. Expressions of interest are now being sought from documentary makers and novice film-makers, to produce short films focussing on the aged and community care sector as part of the ACSA Conference Short Film Festival competition.

The theme for the ACSA 2009 National Conference is *Get Up, Stand Up!*, and who can doubt that it's time for the aged and community care industry to stand up for their rights and the rights of the people they support?

Consistent with the theme of the Conference, short films that challenge current thinking about aged and community care are wanted. Two categories are on offer: a two minute snapshot, and a five minute mini-documentary. A \$500 prize will be offered to the winner of each category, and in addition each winner will receive an item that will be of use in their workplace.

Finalists' film clips will be screened in the main Conference room and in the exhibition hall. The winning films will be announced and screened at the culmination of the Conference.

ACSA members are invited to send this information onto local schools and TAFEs (or to local media outlets) who may wish to work with them in producing an entry for the competition. Expressions of interest to: lexie@eecw.com.au by 9 March 2009.

ACSA Publications

- Issue 2 of ACSA’s *National Housing Report*, dated 9 February has been released. It reports on the briefing with the Prime Minister and Ministers Plibersek and Macklin on 6 February attended by ACSA CEO, Greg Mundy; the National Building Initiative; the new National Affordable Housing Agreement; National Rental Assistance Scheme progress and the Homelessness, Ageing and Road Home report. Roland Naufal speculates in an article on what housing would be like “If money was no problem.”

If you have not received a copy, it may be accessed at the ACSA website: www.agedcare.org.au

- *Agendas* Issue 49 Autumn 2009 - Learning from Excellence - Australia and Overseas is now being sent to subscribers, and to ACSA members via State Associations. It features articles by Ian Hardy on international perspectives for consumer directed care; Eldercare's innovative safety programs; and the need for Commonwealth leadership in aged care by Professor Hal Kendig.

If you wish to subscribe to *Agendas*, the details are also on the ACSA website under publications.

Opposition Concern over ACAT Assessments

The Opposition has expressed concern about the effectiveness and consistency of Aged Care Assessment Teams (ACATs).

Between 20 March and 17 December 2008, 3,880 of the 46,975 people admitted to residential aged care were reassessed by an ACAT team following admission to residential aged care. Almost 2,500 – or five per cent of total admissions – went from a low care ACAT assessment to a high care assessment. In the same period, 32 residents went from a high care ACAT assessment to a low care assessment.

The Opposition's ageing spokesperson, Margaret May, admitted that the needs of some residents had probably increased but said the sheer number of changes was concerning. "It's very hard to tell what the reason behind all the reassessments is but it is certain that there is something that is not adding up," she said.

"It seems that there would have to be something wrong with the system to have so many reassessments done."

ACSA has been making representations to Government for some time about inaccurate ACAT assessments and in particular the fact that the financial risk for these is born by aged care providers.

Australian Government to Publish Quality Data on Nursing Homes

The Minister for Ageing, Mrs Justine Elliot, has announced that from 1 July 2009, information on a state-by-state or territory-by-territory basis will be provided on nursing homes or hostels which:

- have been the subject of an official sanction in the previous year;
- are currently the subject of an official sanction;
- have received a notice of non-compliance (NNC) in the previous year; or
- is currently the subject of a NNC.

The expanded dedicated web-page on the existing website www.agedcareaustralia.gov.au would contain information relating to their compliance with government safety and standard levels. Minister Elliot said the decision to make this information easily accessible followed representations from consumer and advocate groups to improve transparency and accountability. Currently, there is some information on the current sanctions at

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ageing-rescare-sanction.htm>, and there is an archived sanctions site for those which have been lifted or expired at www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/ageing-rescare-sanction-sancarch.htm

In the lead-up to the development of the new webpage, the Australian Government would consult with the Ageing Consultative Committee – which meets in Canberra on March 25.

Only 10 homes out of 2830 facilities are currently sanctioned, so Minister Elliot was right to repeat that “the vast majority of nursing homes are doing an excellent job.” Some indeed may see her announcement as a bit of an overreaction. Unfortunately the announcement provoked predictable media headings such as “Shoddy nursing homes to be named” and “Bad nursing homes named and shamed”. The reforms proposed by the *National Health & Hospitals Reform Commission’s Interim Report* include making information about service quality more readily available to consumers but it is not clear that information about bureaucratic compliance is what they had in mind – or that that is what consumers want. ACSA will continue working with Government to encourage a wider view of what’s really required to support older people and aged care services.

Dementia Resources

A new set of national resources is now available to people living with dementia and their carers, including an interactive website featuring virtual tours, a DVD, help sheets, checklists and a poster book. The collection of training resources, developed by Baptist Community Services – NSW & ACT (BCS), aims to improve quality of life for people living with dementia.

An interactive website, www.dementiatechnology.org.au, offers virtual tours of BCS’ Age Friendly Home in Marsfield, focussing on individual rooms in a house that have been modified to assist people living with dementia with issues of safety, security and independence. The website showcases ideas, and offers product, supplier and manufacturer information for a variety of the featured products and modifications.

Useful for dementia care workers and service providers, the 20-minute DVD highlights possible difficulties a person with dementia may experience in and around their home, while demonstrating environmental and assistive technology strategies and solutions. The DVD is accompanied by a facilitator’s guide for group use.

Thirty-three help sheets and a home checklist offer carers the opportunity to ensure to improve areas of the home that impact on the independence, safety and leisure for people living with dementia. Help sheets cover topics including lighting, medication, nutrition, technology for carers, and wandering.

Contact details for key organisations offering service and product information throughout Australia are also provided on the help sheets.

Family carers will be able to use the resources in their own homes, while care workers, health professionals and service providers will use the resources in training and group scenarios.

All resources, as well as a poster and brochures promoting the resources, can be obtained by contacting the Department of Health and Ageing at www.health.gov.au or the National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500.

Copies of the help sheets, posters and home checklist can be downloaded from the website www.dementiatechnology.org.au

Addressing Broader Workforce Priorities - Productivity Places Program

Since the commencement of the Productivity Places Program (PPP) in April 2008 and the announcement of free training for jobseekers, there has been much interest in the outcome and distribution of the places.

The Department of Education and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) recently provided the Community Services & Health Industry Skills Council (CS&H ISC) with a list of enrolments, commencements and completions of community services and health qualifications.

PPP – Jobseeker update as at 16 January 2009 from April 2008.

Qualification Title	Total Enrolled	Commenced	Completed
Certificate III in Aged Care Work	7928	6660	3044
Certificate II in Community Services Support Work	1018	814	422
Certificate III in Community Services Work	791	600	202
Certificate III in Home and Community Care	765	609	258
Certificate III in Disability Work	650	531	142
Certificate IV in Aged Care Work	123	97	26
Certificate IV in Disability Work	122	87	11
Certificate IV in Community Services Work	102	63	17
(other categories were shown but are not listed here)			
Total	11,499	9,461	4,122

The CS&H ISC Environmental Scan 2008 highlighted an acute and immediate need for workforce reform and development. The traditional occupational structure of the workforce is suffering shortages of supply in nursing, medicine and allied health as well as in the vocational education and training (VET) sector of the workforce. The challenge for the future workforce is not only an increase in numbers but also the realignment in roles and functions to support outcomes.

The ISC has established a Training Needs Scan process and is encouraging all RTOs and Enterprises to work in partnership to undertake an analysis of their workforce development requirements. The Training Needs Scan can be accessed at www.sevenscope.com.au.

Bushfire Update

In a one-off measure, the Australian Government has fast-tracked the care for 16 older Australians – who lived in the bushfire areas – by removing the requirement for ACAT care assessments enabling them to get emergency respite care in aged care homes. Five of the 16 were accepted from hospitals; another has since been taken in by a family member while another person has subsequently passed away. There are now 14 in nursing homes. The measure gave them immediate access to both accommodation and care. This was until they are able to make longer-term arrangements or decide that they wish to be admitted to aged care on a permanent basis.

Care for Your Workers

Employers in the caring professions need to put staff validation and recognition at the top of their health and safety agendas, according to a Queensland researcher.

PhD student, Wendell Cockshaw, from Queensland University of Technology's School of Psychology and Counselling said acceptance at work has a strong impact on general wellbeing.

“What we already know is that a sense of ‘belongingness’ is a fundamental human need, much like food, water and air,” said Mr Cockshaw.

“And a lot of people, including some employers in the health and service industry haven't caught up with this yet.”

Mr Cockshaw said a sense of belonging at work is crucial because a person's vocation shapes their identity. And it makes good business sense too.

“Feelings of psychological wellbeing and belonging lead to much improved productivity,” he said. “A general sense of ‘belongingness’ is strongly linked to greatly reduced compensation payouts too. Although the focus of a lot of health and safety concern is on walking under ladders, a substantial proportion of long-term sick leave cases are around ‘stress leave’.”

The good news is that there are some simple implications for the workplace. “For the bosses, it means always sending a small signal about your respect for somebody's wellbeing and the things that make them unique,” said Mr Cockshaw.

“And more generally, if you notice that your mood has been affected by a negative interaction with someone in the workplace, 'recharge your batteries' by communicating with somebody else who is likely to give you a positive token.”

<http://www.qut.edu.au/> go to News & Events then search for “Feeling wanted at work”

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities, Carers and the Voluntary Sector

Senator Mitch Fifield from Victoria has been appointed as the Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities, Carers and the Voluntary Sector. Senator Fifield, 42, has been in Parliament since 2004 and has been active on Parliamentary committees. He is a former Army Reservist and policy adviser.

Canberra Stalls on e-health Details

The Australian newspaper IT reporter, Karen Dearne, reported on 3 February that Australia finally has an agreed national strategy for e-health adoption, “but the Government is withholding details of the plan, which could save billions of dollars in costs resulting from medical errors.”

She reported: “Costings for the National E-Health Strategy have not been released, nor has a rollout schedule. The strategy was developed at a cost of \$1.3 million by consultancy Deloitte after extensive consultations with health stakeholders, and was endorsed by the Australian Health Ministers' Conference in December. The Deloitte report says up to 18% of medical errors result from lack of access to patient information, with these adverse events costing about \$3 billion a year

‘in avoidable expenditure - money that could be better spent on health demands driven by an ageing and sicker population.’ ”

“The report said lack of maturity in health IT had ‘important implications for patient safety’. ‘In a complex, multi-point service delivery environment with hundreds of millions of encounters each year, reliance on largely manual processes and information flows creates the potential for errors and inefficiencies.’ ”

“According to the ministers' group the new strategy ‘provides a practical framework and set of priorities that will support health reform’, and ‘reinforces the existing collaboration on the core foundations of a national e-health system’. Yet just a brief executive summary has been released, and it doesn't contain any actual plans, timetables or costings.”

“Federal Health Minister Nicola Roxon declined to reveal further details of the e-health strategy, and a spokesman said the full report could not be released without the consent of all AHMC members. ‘Together with my health minister colleagues, I was pleased to endorse the national strategy in early December,’ Ms Roxon said. ‘It will allow prioritisation of existing and future investment in national health IT infrastructure and activities.’ ”

“But instead of the anticipated changes the minister said the National E-Health Transition Authority would continue its foundation work on interoperability and information security. Astoundingly, more than \$5 billion has been spent on e-health projects and trials by federal and state governments over the past 10 years, with only "marginal progress" resulting. The report says some of these projects have delivered promising results, but almost all cannot easily be connected to other health systems or scaled up to support larger groups.”

“ ‘At a system level, this undermines the nation's ability to promote equity in health outcomes, drive meaningful safety and efficiency gains, and ensure safeguards for personal health information. There is a point at which the number of these disparate systems will be so great, and integration so difficult,’ that realising gains from an integrated system ‘may be prohibitively risky and expensive’.”

“At the Council of Australian Governments meeting in late November, NEHTA was granted \$218 million in ongoing funding from July 2009 to June 2012. It is unclear how NEHTA, revitalised under a new regime, will be restructured to create a new, entirely separate, e-health entity, as envisioned by Deloitte.”

Younger People with Disability in Residential Aged Care Program

This AIHW report includes information from the 2007–08 Younger People with Disability in Residential Aged Care Minimum Data Set (YPIRAC MDS). It summarises the characteristics of people who were ‘on the books’ during 2007–08 and the YPIRAC services they received. People included in ‘on the books’ are those who accepted YPIRAC services in 2006–07 and continued to receive services (including monitoring only) in 2007–08, along with new starters in 2007–08. Highlights include:

As at 30 June 2008, a total of 580 people were accessing YPIRAC - funded services. There has been a shift in focus from relocating people living in residential aged care accommodation (target group 1) to diverting people living in the community who were at risk of admission to residential aged care (target group 2). Of the 580 YPIRAC service users 398 were living in residential aged care; 162 were living in other settings, including private residences and domestic scale disability accommodation and 20 were in hospital.

The program continued to focus on the initial priority age group, under 50 years, which accounted for 83% of service users in 2007–08. Acquired brain injury (ABI) was the predominant primary disability group 46% of service users and more than half of service users with ABI recorded as a primary disability were in residential aged care awaiting alternative accommodation.

Exploring Improved Communications Access for Disabled Australians

The Rudd Government is investigating new ways to improve access to communications services and technologies for people with disabilities. It has commissioned a feasibility study to investigate the efficiency of the current arrangements, an analysis of emerging technologies and demand, projected costs and funding options.

Draft Australian Standards to Provide Access to Buildings

The House of Representatives Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee has released three draft Australian Standards relating to access to premises for people with disabilities. The Australian Standards provide technical detail to support the draft Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standards (Premises Standards). The drafts will assist community organisations and other stakeholders in preparing their submissions to the Committee's inquiry into the appropriateness and effectiveness of the Draft Disability (Access to Premises - Buildings) Standards

UK Malnutrition in Elderly Report

A British Association for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition (BAPEN) Report has reviewed previous research on the extent of malnutrition in a range of settings from hospitals and mental health units to sheltered housing and care homes.

Researchers estimated that of the three million either malnourished or at risk of malnutrition, 93% were living at home or in sheltered accommodation, 5% were in care homes and 3% in hospitals and other NHS settings.

They said elderly people, particularly those with long-term conditions, were most at risk, although isolation and poverty also played key roles. The report said the health cost of the problem was also likely to be in the region of £13Billion - twice as high as some previous estimates. Malnourished people stay in hospital longer, succumb to infection more often and visit their GP more frequently.

Professor Marinos Elia, one of the lead authors of the report and a former chair of BAPEN, said: "The emphasis must now be on prevention and that means spotting it in the community." As well as GPs, he said pharmacists could get involved in community screening, while transport planners could do more to ensure people had good links to supermarkets.

Pension Drawdown Relief for Retirees

Treasurer Wayne Swan and Senator Nick Sherry, Minister for Superannuation and Corporate Law, have announced relief from minimum account-based pension draw down requirements. The measure responds to concerns that meeting the minimum draw down amount in 2008-09 will mean having to sell investments assets and realise losses in a depressed market.

In response to these legitimate concerns, the Government will suspend the minimum drawdown requirement for account-based pensions for the second half of 2008-09. This will occur through a 50 per cent reduction in the minimum payment amount for 2008-09.

The temporary relief also addresses the concern that the minimum draw down requirement was set based on asset values as at 1 July 2008, when equity values were higher.

For those people who have already taken half of the current minimum payment for 2008-09, the annual nature of the minimum payment rules means that a further payment will not be required until the end of the 2009-10 year.

“The Government will continue to closely monitor market conditions and examine options for a longer term solution to this issue following the Australia’s Future Tax System Review,” the Treasurer said.

The temporary suspension of the minimum payment requirement will apply to account-based annuities and pensions (payable since 1 July, 2007); allocated annuities and pensions (pre-dating the Better Super changes); account-based and allocated pensions payable from Retirement Savings Accounts, and market-linked (term allocated) annuities and pensions.

Aged & Community Services Australia
Level 1, 36 Albert Road, South Melbourne, Vic, 3205
Ph: 03 9686 3460 Fax: 03 9686 3453
Email: info@agedcare.org.au www.agedcare.org.au