

The National Report

17 July, 2008 – Issue 184
Aged & Community Services Australia



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2008 ACSA National Conference

“Aged Care in the Fast Lane”: Update

On-line registration is now available at www.agedcare.org.au

Before confirming your travel reservations and accommodation, make sure you have checked out the pre conference workshops. Chances are that even footy fanatics may have to catch an early morning plane to Adelaide, then grab a pie floater outside the station before heading off to register then attend one of the stimulating Sunday afternoon workshops.



Technology Symposium - The Future of Aged Care Starts Now

This symposium will explore trends, advances, practical application and issues in assistive and information technology in aged care service delivery.

A keynote presentation from Lloyd Walker, Director of Research, Technology & Innovation at Novita Children's Services will examine trends and developments. Lloyd has degrees in Mechanical Engineering and Bioengineering and credentials in assistive technology practice from Australia and the USA.

NovitaTech is currently Australia's largest Rehabilitation Engineering centre and runs the only accredited testing laboratory for rehabilitation equipment in Australia. This award winning group provides services for, and has been instrumental in many developments in technology and standards for people with disabilities of all ages.

International speaker Jack York, Co-founder and President of It's Never Too Late (IN2L) will present with Nigel Langes & Terry Wilby from Tailem Bend District Hospital on an IN2L Australian experience.

IN2L was founded in 1999 and specialises in adaptive computer labs for older adults. Their unique combination of adaptive technology allows individuals, regardless of any physical or cognitive disabilities, to be able to take advantage of the health and connectivity benefits of the internet. Jack presented at ACSA's 2007 Conference and interest was extremely high. This presentation will provide an update on plans to bring IN2L to Australia.

Participants can choose to focus on either information or assistive technology in two concurrent streams.

Numbers are strictly limited so book early. Details are available in the registration brochure which is now online at www.agedcare.org.au

ACIC Capital Survey for Members

ACSA and ACAA are conducting a survey on members' intentions to undertake capital works. Please take the time to complete the survey on our website at www.agedcare.org.au (*under Hot Topics*).

National Infection Control Guidelines for Nursing Homes

In response to recent gastro outbreaks in nursing homes, the Minister for Ageing, Justine Elliot has announced a response plan, involving:

- A review of the accreditation standards on infection control:
- Development of a gastro awareness and prevention education kit; and
- Development of new national guidelines specifically on norovirus - a common and highly infectious cause of gastroenteritis in nursing homes.

The plan will build on the new Food Safety Standard which was gazetted in October 2006 by the previous government and will come into effect on 5 October 2008. This new standard mandates a requirement for organisations, including nursing homes to deliver food services to vulnerable populations to implement a food safety plan.

In 2007, there were 1,825 gastro reported outbreaks in Australia. Of those, 989 (54 per cent) were in nursing homes, Minister Elliot said. From 1 January 2008 to present, there have been 671 gastro reported outbreaks nationally, with 383 (57 per cent) reported in nursing homes.

She said the Department of Health and Ageing was working with the States and Territories – who legislate on, and investigate, infectious diseases – to develop a national communication strategy for a more rapid information flow about outbreaks of infectious diseases between nursing homes, public health authorities and the Aged Care Complaints Investigation Scheme.

“Infection control in nursing homes is a big task when one considers that residents are often frail, aged and vulnerable to infection,” Minister Elliot said. “We can never wipe out infectious diseases but we must always look at ways to minimise risk.”

Full details of the three areas covered by the response plan are available at <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/ministers/publishing.nsf/Content/mr-yr08-je-je119.htm?OpenDocument>

This factual statement and plan of action has been welcomed by the industry. ACSA supports the development of resources to assist members who are in the front line on infection prevention and control.

“We will work with the Commonwealth to help develop useful and practical evidence based approaches,” ACSA CEO Greg Mundy commented.

Uniting Aged Care Temporary Takeover of Bridgewater Aged Care

Minister Elliot has announced that the Commonwealth has entered into an agreement with Uniting Aged Care to temporarily take over the running of Bridgewater while allowing the Administrators, Stephen Longley, David McEvoy and Tim Cuming from PricewaterhouseCoopers, to focus on investigating the financial affairs of the former approved provider of the home (Vitality Care) and to continue to seek a sale of the facility.

This follows earlier steps taken by the Rudd Government to protect the residents of the privately owned Bridgewater Aged Care in Melbourne following the financial collapse of the home and the appointment of Administrators on 23 May 2008. These steps included:

- Appointment and funding of a clinical nurse adviser team;
- Reimbursement of the administrators for paying staff salaries and wages owed prior to 23 May 2008;
- Funding for the administrators to cover liabilities directly incurred in connection with the continued operation of Bridgewater, professional fees directly associated with the administrators’ responsibilities in operating Bridgewater and expenses directly associated with the investigation of the accommodation bond balances; and
- The appointment of case managers for each resident and their family to provide information and assistance.

Uniting Aged Care is one of Australia’s largest not-for-profit organisations and will be responsible for ensuring that residents of Bridgewater continue to receive a high standard of care, and that employees’ salary, wage and other employee entitlements will continue to be met. Minister Elliot said meetings with residents, relatives and staff have been held to inform them of the new arrangements.

Aged care industry award deferred

The Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) removed aged care from its list of priority industries or occupations for creating a new award, on 20 June. This was in line with the views of the Aged Care Industry Council (ACSA & ACCA) on this point as well as those of the Health Services Union.

The ACTU and ANF had argued for one nurses' award including aged care staff, while the industry supports the making of one aged care industry award for all staff regardless of occupation.

The AIRC encouraged the parties to commence award modernisation discussions right across the health sector, despite being excluded in the list of priority industries.

“It is neither necessary nor desirable to decide now whether there should be a nursing occupational modern award rather than industry modern awards in aged care and health (or parts of health) that also cover nurses. That issue is better resolved by the Full Bench that will deal with aged care, health and nursing and will be determined, at least on a provisional basis, during or after the pre-drafting consultation when the Commission will be much better informed on the implications of deciding whether or not there should be an occupational nursing modern award,”the AIRC stated.

Minimum Wage Decision

The Australian Fair Pay Commission has awarded an across-the-board \$21.66-a-week pay increase to employees on minimum rates of pay, including those on awards in the health, aged and community care industries.

The decision, which will take effect from the first pay period from October 1, 2008, will apply to some 1.3 million workers. The decision is available at:

<http://www.fairpay.gov.au/fairpay/WageSettingDecisions/General/2008/>

Overseas Workers for the Aged Care Sector

ACSA has written an informative discussion paper *Overseas Workers for the Aged Care Sector* to assist members in understanding the industry workforce supply and shortage implications within a broader industry workforce framework.

The current workforce shortage is one of the main issues confronting the aged and community care industry today across all professional and occupational categories.

The ageing of the overall and industry workforce population is exacerbating the labour shortage problem. In the short term, overseas workers are helping to alleviate acute shortages in many industries.

The paper is available on the ACSA website and gives background information on the Australian and aged care workforce, immigration, visas and sponsored skilled workers in aged care.

NSW Program of Appliances for Disabled People Funding Boost

NSW Minister for Health Reba Meagher and Minister Elliot have announced a one-off \$11 million funding package to support people across NSW living with long-term disabilities through the NSW Program of Appliances for Disabled People (PADP).

The joint State-Commonwealth funding boost will provide essential equipment for about 5,000 people living with disabilities, and aims to eliminate the current waiting list for disability aids and equipment.

Minister Elliot said the Australian Governments' allocation of \$5 million will support older people through the provision of equipment to assist with permanent physical disabilities.

Australian Life Expectancy Rates

Minister Elliot has released the top 10 areas of Australia with the highest life expectancy for both men and women, using new data compiled from recent ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) reports and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's *Australia's Health 2008* report.

The Sunshine Coast has Australia's longest life expectancy for women in Australia at 84.7 years and the Upper Great Southern Statistical Division (the agricultural area southeast of Perth) with an average of 84.6 years. This is followed closely by Perth at 84.4 years, WA's Midlands, north of Perth at 84.3 years and outer Adelaide at 84.2 years.

For men, Canberra and Melbourne tie for the longest life expectancy in Australia at 80 years. Australian men reaching the age of 65 can now expect to live to about 83 years and women to about 86 years – about six more than their counterparts a century ago.

Internationally, Australia's longevity rates at 81.4 years are second to Japan: Australian women are fifth in longevity at 83.7 years and Australian men (79 years) are second after Icelanders. This year, Australian men – for the first time – passed Japanese men.

Commonwealth Funded Packaged Care Guide

The updated Commonwealth Funded Packaged Care Guide (formerly called the CACP Fee Guide) is now available.

This guide now covers CACP, EACH and EACHD. It reflects changes effective from 1 July to the Australian income tax rates, taxation thresholds, the low income and senior Australian tax offsets and the Medicare levy phase-in limits.

The guide can be downloaded or obtained from the State Associations.

Aged Care Success

Churchill Fellowship Awarded to Ian Hardy, CEO Helping Hand

After being made a Member of the Order of Australia on the Queen's Birthday holiday for "service to the community, particularly in the area of aged care as a leading contributor to the development of better services..." Ian Hardy, CEO Helping Hand, has been awarded a Churchill Fellowship.

He will use his fellowship to research and study consumer-directed aged care policy in the UK, Germany, Austria and Japan.

"This opportunity to undertake a study tour will provide the chance to see and experience first-hand the benefits and challenges of a consumer-directed approach to aged care," he said.

RSL Care team win Australian Business Excellence Award

This Queensland-based not-for-profit provider won an award at the prestigious SAI Global Australian Business Excellence Awards which are open to companies and organisations across all industries and sizes.

RSL Care was recognised for sustainable excellence after being assessed against seven business excellence framework categories, including customer and market focus and process innovation and improvement.

RSL Care has been using the business excellence framework for four years now and the organisation's CEO, Ross Smith said it was a great honour to be recognised as a business leader.

"It not only gives our residents, clients, their families and our staff a huge sense of pride but is great for our industry which is challenging, complex and frequently scrutinized," he said.

RDNS Annual Report Wins International Design Award

The Royal District Nursing Service Victoria's 2007 Annual Report has won the gold award for graphic design in an international awards program.

The Educational Resource Centre (ERC) at the Royal Children's Hospital - a multimedia facility, which specialises in clinical photography, graphic design, multimedia and web production - designed the report and entered it in the American based HeSCA (Health and Science Communications Association), annual awards program, called the Media Festival.

The HeSCA Media Festival is judged by leading biocommunication professionals with currency in the field, evaluating technical quality, production values and techniques, educational design, technological innovation, creativity, and craftsmanship of the media product.

Petrol Prices Hitting Care Services

The Royal District Nursing Service (RDNS) in Victoria has warned of the impact to their services on soaring petrol prices, with every one cent petrol price increase costing an extra \$8,700 a year in operating costs. At current prices this means that in the next 12 months it will spend over half a million dollars more to visit RDNS clients in their homes compared to the 2005 financial year.

If prices climb to \$2.30 a litre, as predicted by some commentators, this would mean a further half a million dollars on top of that. The increases amount to over \$2 million in just four years – or 27,866 hours of care that could have been provided to clients, now simply burned up in petrol costs.

Minister Elliot has said the Rudd Government had a range of measures relating to petrol and community care, including a Petrol Commissioner and the Fuelwatch scheme. In addition, the Government has committed an extra \$15 million over three years to help community organisations and their volunteers with their work, including fuel bills.

The Government will expand items eligible for funding under the program to include petrol vouchers for volunteers who use their vehicle, beginning this month (July). This will bring the total funding for the *Volunteer Grants Program* to \$64 million over the next three years.

New Disability and Race Discrimination Commissioners

Attorney-General Robert McClelland has announced two substantive appointments to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. Mr Graeme Innes AM has been appointed Disability Discrimination Commissioner and Mr Tom Calma has been appointed as Race Discrimination Commissioner.

Appeal Against SA Coroner's Court Nursing Home Death Finding Fails

The case of *Saraf and Anor v Johns* [2008] SASC 166, concerned an appeal from findings and recommendations of the Coroner's Court following the death of a resident at a nursing home.

The appellant is a medical practitioner and sole director of Brighton Aged Care Facility, where a resident, Ms Gladys Wells was found dead in her bed. The Coroner contended that the death was reportable under s3 of the *Coroners Act 2003* (SA) ("the Act"), due to the 'unusual' position in which Ms Wells was found - half-in and half-out of the bed. Furthermore, three recommendations were made, one of which was to prohibit medical practitioners from certifying deaths in a nursing home where they have a financial interest.

Amongst other grounds, the appellants challenged the conclusion that it was a reportable death, which justified a subsequent inquest, as well as challenging the findings and recommendations themselves and the power of the Coroner's Court to make recommendations.

The Court held that Ms Wells' death was not 'unusual', as the medical evidence suggested that it was a position that an infirm person might get into during the course of dying. Nevertheless, it was still a reportable death as she had died from 'an undetermined cause'. Secondly, it was held that the Coroner's Court only has authority to exercise powers and functions conferred by legislation. The

recommendations were of a nature that fell outside the power in s25(2) of the Act, and were therefore invalid.

National Preventative Health Taskforce

The National Preventative Health Taskforce will release a discussion paper this September on the Australian Government's blueprint for refocussing the health system on prevention.

Public comment on the discussion paper will assist the taskforce to develop the National Preventative Health Strategy to guide the Government in tackling the burden of chronic disease currently caused by obesity, tobacco, and excessive consumption of alcohol.

The strategy is central to heading off an unsustainable burden of chronic disease, taking pressure off our public hospitals, and improving our workforce participation and productivity.

The taskforce will consult extensively in developing the strategy. The discussion paper will set out a framework for the strategy and key issues. A draft of the strategy will then be completed and released for comment in March 2009 before the finalised strategy itself is handed to the Government in June 2009.

To prevent people having to make multiple similar submissions, the taskforce will examine relevant publicly available submissions made to the 2020 Summit, the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission, and the House of Representatives Inquiry into Obesity. But it is still calling for wider comment.

Ideas should be submitted to: www.preventativehealth.org.au.

Guidelines for the Care of People in Post-Coma Unresponsiveness

The National Health and Medical Research Council has just released two documents for the care of people in post-coma unresponsiveness (vegetative state) or a minimally responsive state:

- Ethical Guidelines for the Care of People in Post-Coma Unresponsiveness (Vegetative State) or a Minimally Responsive State, and its companion document,
- *A Guide for Families and Carers of People with Profound Brain Damage.*

The guidelines aim to contribute to the care of people in a state of post-coma unresponsiveness (PCU) or a minimally responsive state (MRS) by addressing ethical issues associated with this care – especially the complicated issues that have proved difficult for families, health professionals, courts and tribunals.

They provide an ethical framework to guide decisions in the best interests of people in PCU or MRS, and they offer a basis for reaching consensus among health professionals and families involved in making these decisions.

They are intended to assist care providers from a time that is sufficiently after the initial injury so as not to interfere with or influence acute management, but at a point when rapid changes are no longer expected.

The *Guide for Families* has been prepared for the families and friends of people in PCU or MRS. It explains these conditions, and the types of treatment and care that may or may not apply in individual situations.

Both documents are aimed at people diagnosed with PCU or MRS diagnosed in accordance with *Post-coma unresponsiveness (Vegetative state): A clinical framework for diagnosis* (NHMRC, 2003).

All three of these publications can be downloaded at:

<http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/index.htm>

Living Is For Everyone: A Framework for Prevention of Suicide in Australia

The revised Living Is For Everyone (LIFE) framework provides updated information to mental health professionals and the wider community to enhance the understanding and prevention of suicide and self harm in Australia. It is an updated version of the first *LiFe* framework which was developed and published in 2000.

Free copies of mental health publications at:

www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-pubs-order

Productivity Commission View on Ageing

While the long awaited (by ACSA at least) Productivity Commission (PC) Research on Trends in the demand and supply of aged care services is yet to be released, perhaps a hint of its flavour may be found in the 2008 Health Policy Oration delivered by PC Chairman Gary Banks at the Australian National University (ANU) on 26 June, titled "Health Costs and Policy in an Ageing Australia."

His address looks at the health 'market', which he sees as a creature of government, and at the role and cost impacts of technological change as a key driver of health costs.

Mr Banks considers the impacts of ageing, saying that population ageing will compound future cost increases, as health costs rise (sharply) with age. He believes that counter-arguments don't hold up, and that the impacts of ageing could even be understated. He examines projected health expenditure, identifying the ageing-related component, and looks at some of the policy implications, and options for governments.

As PC head he naturally looks at attaining the ideal: a 'market' analogy, and examines demand-side policies, a bigger role for 'pricing', information and consumer 'empowerment', preventative action and regulatory options, supply-side policies, incentives and productivity, better decision-making processes, health workforce regulation and remuneration.

Ideal wintertime reading and it's free: www.pc.gov.au/speeches/cs20080328

Older People Speak Out (OPSO) People's Choice Media Awards

Older People Speak Out (OPSO) is concerned by the negative attitude towards ageing held by some in the media and the community.

To help change this attitude OPSO is encouraging people to enter the OPSO People's Choice Media Awards. For the criteria and/or more information please visit www.opso.com.au.

The closing date for nominations is 15 September 2008.

RCS Statistics Update - March 2008 - Correction

Due to reformatting the table included in last fortnights National Report had some errors. Please find below the corrected table.

The latest and last RCS statistics are now available. They comprise

- RCS review statistics by State from 1 January 2008 to 31 March 2008,
- Outcome of Reviews on each Question conducted in the period 1 January 2008 to 31 March 2008 on a national basis,
- Graphical presentation of changes to individual questions as a result of reviews conducted in the period 1 January 2008 to 31 March 2008 on a national basis, and
- RCS Appraisals as at 31 March 2008.

Appraisals as at 31 March 2008 will be available shortly on the Department's Internet site at the following address.

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/content/ageing-rcspage-rsstats.htm>

RCS Review Statistics by State 1 January 2008 to 31 March 2008

State	Unchanged		Upgraded		Downgraded		Reviews Total	Facilities
	No	%	No	%	No	%		
NSW/ACT	815	57%	60	4%	565	39%	1440	118
VIC	858	69%	103	8%	281	23%	1242	108
QLD	555	69%	23	3%	231	29%	809	68
WA	129	49%	5	2%	130	49%	264	22
SA/NT	185	56%	9	3%	136	41%	330	24
TAS	92	69%	6	4%	36	27%	134	12
Total	2634	62%	206	5%	1379	33%	4219	352

RCS Statistics for the Quarters ending September 2007 and December 2007

Nationally Q12 *Emotional Dependence* and Q13 *Danger to Self & Others* continue to be the major areas of downgrade and Q14 *Other Behaviours* is the question predominantly upgraded.

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