

Progress in Improving Australia's Aged Care System

Report of Meeting of the National Aged Care Alliance (NACA)

On 12 August 2021 I attended the above meeting. Because of lock downs due to COVID, the Minister for Health was unable to attend, but senior officials from the Department of Health were present.

Home Care

The Department intends to combine the home care options (CHSP and home care packages) by July 2023. CHSP consumers will be given a light-touch assessment and referred to a provider. Those with higher care needs will be put into classes, each of which will have a suite of support services. If they later need more care, the system will try to provide more services without having to go through the whole assessment procedure again. The Department is looking at comparing home care to residential care. They might use grants in areas of low population or low numbers with certain disabilities. They would like to develop a payment system like the health insurance system. Care management should be a separate item and funded separately. The Department will put out a public consultation paper by the end of August 2021, and run trials in the first half of 2022.

Residential Care Funding Reform

As promised in the Budget, the first payment of the new Basic Daily Fee (BDF) supplement of \$10 per resident per day from 1 July 2021 was paid on 1 August 2021. Providers now must provide quarterly reports for BDF to get paid. \$3.9 billion is also being given to providers to increase care time. They must reach an average of 200 minutes of care time per resident by 1st October 2023. The care times will be "case-mix" adjusted for the 13 AN-ACC classes (AN-ACC will replace ACFI on 1 October 2022). The four factors considered in the AN-ACC classification are: physical ability (including pain); cognitive ability (communication, etc.); behaviour; and mental health. Allied health professionals have not yet been included in the AN-ACC, but the idea is under consideration. No assessment is needed for palliative care. The AN-ACC separates assessment for funding from assessment for care planning.

COVID Vaccination

Nationally 87% of aged care residents have been vaccinated and 65% of aged care staff have had at least one dose. Vaccinations for aged care staff will be made compulsory by 15 September 2021. Vaccinations will not be compulsory for home care staff.

Aged Care Workforce

Although the Budget allocated funding for financial incentives to attract nurses to aged care and provide additional training places for new and existing personal care workers, it did not provide any additional funding to improve the wages of workers in the aged care industry. There are now three work value cases before the Fair Work Commission that seek to increase the wages of all categories of aged care staff by 25%. The Fair Work Commission hearing will be held from 26 April to 11 May 2022. The unions are seeking support from resident's representatives.

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