

Health and Ageing Report a basis for Genuine Reform

The National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission (NHHRC) has released its final report, paving the way for wide-ranging reforms to health and aged care service provision in Australia. While many service providers and peak organisations have cautiously supported the reform proposal, there are contentious issues that are being hotly debated across the country.

COTA Chief Executive Ian Yates commended the Government for giving reform of the health and aged care sectors such high priority, with the report being launched personally by the Prime Minister, who is also involving himself directly in consultation on the Report's 123 recommendations.

After speaking with the Health and Ageing Ministers at the launch in Canberra on 27th July, Ian Yates said "COTA will consider in detail the NHHRC recommendations on the health system, but immediately welcomes the Report's focus on greater health system integration; more and dedicated resources for planned surgery (previously and erroneously called "elective"); higher priority for health promotion, illness prevention and early intervention at all ages, and proposals for a national dental care scheme."

"COTA particularly welcomes the NHHRC's recommendations on the future of aged care," Mr Yates said. "The current system is not meeting the needs of many older Australians who have been forced to accept less than they wanted and deserved. Major reform is critical if we are to have the ability to provide quality care and support for older Australians when and where they need it."

Ian Yates said the report's emphasis on providing care choices for older Australians was essential. "People want to be able to choose the care and support they need delivered in the place they want to be, and for many people that will be about an increase in community care in their own home and neighbourhood"

"Older Australians want an aged care system that helps them continue to contribute to their families and communities by providing timely, well resourced and appropriate support systems on an equitable basis anywhere in Australia."

"The proposed reforms provide a real basis for moving forward in getting the system right. There is now a real opportunity for consumers, providers and Government to get around the same table and fine tune the NHHRC recommendations and agree on how to implement them over the next few years." he said.

"We look forward to working with the Government and other stakeholders over the coming months to ensure optimum quality and sustainable services are available for all older Australians."

Recommendations on Aged and Community Care

Recommendation 88.6 is for the Commonwealth Government to assume full responsibility for public funding of aged care. This would include the Home and Community Care Program for older people and aged care assessment.

There are 123 other specific recommendations, covering many aspects of hospital and health care issues, with section 4.2 covering "Connecting and integrating health and aged care services for people over their lives". Improving access to palliative care services and increasing choice in aged care come under this section.

The full 292 page report can be downloaded at the following link; and for ease of access an executive summary and list of recommendations can be downloaded separately.

<http://www.nhhrc.org.au/internet/nhhrc/publishing.nsf/Content/nhhrc-report>

What others are saying

ACSA

Aged and Community Services Australia (ACSA) is the national peak body representing more than 1,100 church and charitable and community based organisations providing accommodation and care services to over 700,000 older people, people with a disability and their carers.

Acting CEO Pat Sparrow commended the Government for its commitment to genuine reform of the health sector of which aged care is an increasingly important element.

“Aged care as we know it must change to cater for the dramatic rise in the numbers of older Australians in the coming years,” Ms Sparrow said. “The current system isn’t working to meet existing needs. Major reform is critical if we are to have the ability to provide quality care and support for older Australians when and where they need it.”

Ms Sparrow said how the system was funded now, and into the future, had to involve all stakeholders in the sector including consumers, providers, carers and Government. ‘Australia needs an innovative and creative approach to providing and funding aged care. These reforms provide that opportunity. We have to get it right and part of that process involves a vigorous debate on the specific recommendations and transition planning to allow consumers, providers and Government to manage any reforms.

Health Issues Centre

Health Issues Centre is partially funded by the Victorian Government and supports health consumer participation, research and training. It provides a website with extensive information on consumer participation and runs a program linking consumer representatives with health services.

Health Issues Centre CEO Michael Janssen applauded the Commission for making its first and most important principle that health reform must be ‘people and family-centred’.

“These recommendations offer a chance to rebuild health around people, families and wellness,” said Mr Janssen. “For too long health has been built largely around illness, professions and institutions.”

“Consumers are both users and funders of the health system, every bit as important as doctors, hospitals and health insurance companies in the health reform debate,” said Mr Janssen. “Merely consulting with some members of the public on a road trip does not do justice to the place of consumers. A health system re-formed around people must include them formally, at all levels, in all sectors and as active partners, not just passive recipients of healthcare reform.”

“Despite every government in Australia having policies committing them to consumer participation,” said Mr Janssen, “research suggests it has been poorly implemented or supported. If being people-centred is the first principle of the new health system,” he said, “then resources must be made available for wide-spread, effective, and long-term consumer participation in these reforms.”

Consumers, health professionals, health services, and policy makers interested in assistance with health consumer participation can visit the website at www.healthissuescentre.org.au to find out more.