

MEDIA RELEASE

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Aged Care Royal Commission Interim Report provides Government the mandate to commence transformation by December MYEFO

Australia's peak body of older Australians, Council on the Ageing (COTA) Australia, today congratulated the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety on its *"Interim Report: Neglect"*, which has recognised not only the neglect of older people within the aged care system, but also the neglect of successive Governments, that have failed to implement many recommendations from over 18 government inquiries.

COTA Australia Chief Executive, Ian Yates, welcomed the Royal Commissions' confirmation that neglect, abuse and poor care are more widespread than governments and many providers have been prepared to accept, but which COTA has called out over many years.

He also welcomed the Royal Commission's finding that aged care needs fundamental reform and redesign, indeed major transformation, for which COTA has repeatedly called.

Respect for older Australians a cornerstone of achieving better outcomes

"This cruel and harmful system must be changed. We owe it to our parents, our grandparents, our partners, our friends. We owe it to strangers. We owe it to future generations. Older people deserve so much more.

"We have found that the aged care system fails to meet the needs of our older, often very vulnerable, citizens. It does not deliver uniformly safe and quality care for older people. It is unkind and uncaring towards them. In too many instances, it simply neglects them."¹

COTA Australia in particular welcomes the Royal Commission's recognition that older Australians are neglected not only within the aged care system which supports around 1.3 million older Australians each year, but also in the negative attitudes towards older people within the broader community.

"COTA agrees with the Royal Commission that older Australians should be more valued by the wider community. It's not just about loving your grandparents, Australians need to also reach out as a community and support their elderly neighbours and fellow citizens, many of whom are still waiting to receive care they've been assessed as needing and won't even be in the formal care system," Mr Yates said.

"Part of this respect includes ensuring the Federal Government stops neglecting aged care when it comes to Budget decisions both in December's MYEFO and the Federal Budget next May.

"If the government is taking the Royal Commission seriously and is also serious about respecting the many people and experts who have given their time to the process so far, then they cannot ignore this report and must commit more funds in the forthcoming MYEFO."

While some actions will need to wait for the Final Report of the Commission in a year's time, the Interim Report identifies urgent need to act in three areas.

Urgent injection of funds for Home Care Packages

Mr Yates said that the government must take on board the Royal Commission's finding that home care waiting times over 12 months have created an "unsafe" system and must urgently inject urgent funding of \$2 - 2.5 billion per year to reduce the home care waiting time to acceptable levels.

¹ Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, Interim Report: Neglect, Volume 1, p1

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“While the Government will need time to consider the total report, the inescapable message from the Royal Commission is that hundreds of millions of dollars are needed towards Home Care Packages - now, this year, not in 2020.

“COTA has repeatedly advocated that older Australians must not wait longer than three months for care and the Department of Health told the Royal Commission this would cost between \$2-2.5 billion per annum to achieve,” Mr Yates said.

On a recent ABC Q&A program Minister Colbeck said that target should be no more than 60 days.

“Too many people are dying waiting for care or are being forced into residential aged care when they choose not to be there and should have real choices about where they live as they age. “

Reduce over-reliance on chemical restraint in aged care now

The Royal Commission has also identified that the use of chemical restraints in aged care is shockingly widespread and immediate action can and must be taken to reduce the overuse of chemical restraint by providers and doctors.

“Within a few years, with an improvement in skills, clinical governance systems and staffing across aged care we believe it must be eliminated entirely,” Mr Yates said.

COTA will continue to engage with Government and the Senate to improve the regulations so that they ensure chemical restraint is a last, not first choice for aged care workers, and requires active, informed consent.

“The Government’s recent regulations on chemical restraint are a step forward but need improvement to ensure that chemical restraint is always a last resort, and used only for a short time,” said Mr Yates

“Government needs to implement measures to improve not only the prescribing behaviour of GPs, but also the number of times aged care staff decide that chemical restraint should be used for individual clients once it has been prescribed.”

Confirm the timetable for removing Younger People with a Disability from Nursing Homes

COTA Australia backs the call from the Young People in Nursing Homes National Alliance that Government should immediately adopt the Commission’s Report’s timeframes that no new young Australians should enter residential aged care from 2022, and that by 2025 all young Australians who do not wish to will no longer reside in aged care.

“The funding of the NDIS presents a unique opportunity to provide appropriate accommodation alternatives to younger Australians with a disability. We support the Commission’s timeframe and call on the Government to make this commitment,” said Mr Yates.

COTA commends the Commissioners

“The Commissioners must be commended for the way they have taken on board the many voices and experiences of people using aged care and their families in a system that views aged care as a transaction rather than a relationship or even care; is designed around process rather than good outcomes; and lacks transparency,” Mr Yates said.

“There are clear structural reforms that are needed but cultural change is absolutely critical as well, from the level of governance and senior management down.

“That includes looking at the way we view aged care as a profession. The Interim Report explains just how that workforce is under pressure, underappreciated and lacking in key skills.”

Mr Yates thanked the Commissioners for their time and effort in producing such a thorough report which shows great empathy for people accessing aged care and working in the sector.

“In particular, we record our appreciation of Commissioner Richard Tracey’s contribution to the Interim Report prior to his recent passing.”

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