Inquiry on the future of Australia’s aged care sector workforce

Vision 2020 Australia submission to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee

March 2016
Contents

General comments 3
Summary of recommendations 4
Responding to the Terms of Reference 5
  a. The current composition of the aged care workforce 5
  b. Future aged care workforce requirements, including the impacts of sector growth, changes in how care is delivered, and increasing competition for workers 7
  c. The interaction of aged care workforce needs with employment by the broader community services sector, including workforce needs in disability, health and other areas, and increased employment as the National Disability Insurance Scheme rolls out 10
  d. Challenges in attracting and retaining aged care workers 12
  j. Challenges of creating a culturally competent and inclusive aged care workforce to cater for the different care needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse groups and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people 13
  k. The particular aged care workforce challenges in regional towns and remote communities 15
  l. Impact of the Government’s cuts to the Aged Care Workforce Fund 16

Conclusion 17
General comments

Vision 2020 Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide comment to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee on the future of Australia’s aged care sector workforce. It is estimated there are over 575,000 people living with blindness or vision impairment across Australia and the majority of these are aged over 65 years. Alongside an increasing ageing population, it is critical that the blindness and vision impairment services sector and the aged care sector more generally is formulated to cater for the needs of this growing group of Australians.

As the population ages and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is rolled out, demand for blindness and vision impairment services is expected to increase. In order to meet this increasing demand it will be essential for the blindness and vision impairment services sector to train, recruit and retain more staff who specialise in aged care, particularly in allied health roles. Opportunities for skills development, career paths and adequate remuneration or incentives are important characteristics of the blindness and vision impairment services sector that can be improved to attract and retain a highly skilled workforce and to develop management skills.

Vision 2020 Australia asserts a number of recommendations to the Senate Committee on how an industry development strategy, built on advice from consumers, service providers and government can work to ensure people who are blind or vision impaired have the services and supports they need to fully participate in the community. The first priority in developing this strategy will be the establishment of a government advisory committee, comprised of consumer representatives, service providers and departmental staff, to report to the minister responsible on how the projected demand for blindness and vision impairment services will be met in the medium to long term.

Vision 2020 Australia

Vision 2020 Australia represents around 50 member organisations involved in: local and global eye care; health promotion; low vision support; vision rehabilitation; eye research; professional assistance and community support.

This submission has been developed in collaboration with the Vision 2020 Australia Independence and Participation Committee (the Committee). The Committee brings together a diverse group of members providing services and supports to people who are blind or vision impaired across Australia; enabling an unique platform for stakeholders to collaborate, foster consensus and develop a shared understanding on matters of significance affecting member organisations and consumers. Through drawing on the knowledge, experience, and resources of the Committee’s broad and inclusive membership, the Committee is central to supporting one of Vision 2020 Australia’s key roles as an effective conduit to government, offering a unified and consistent voice.

Vision 2020 Australia broadly supports the submissions put forward by our member organisations, namely Vision Australia and sector partner Guide Dogs Australia, both of whom provide services and supports to people who are blind or vision impaired, a majority of whom are over 65 years.

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Summary of recommendations

Vision 2020 Australia recommends that the Committee support:

**Recommendation 1:** investment in practical training forums and resources to support transitioning to a consumer directed care model

**Recommendation 2:** implementation of specific safeguards and regulations to ensure against the monopoly effect to enable consumer choice.

**Recommendation 3:** the delivery of quality education and training for the blindness and vision impairment services sector, reducing unnecessary regulatory burdens and increasing education pathways to the blindness and vision impairment services sector.

**Recommendation 4:** the investment and development of a macro-level industry development strategy to enhance and support a sustainable quality workforce in the blindness and vision impairment services sector.

**Recommendation 5:** the establishment of a government advisory committee; comprised of consumer representatives, service providers and departmental staff, to report to the Minister responsible on how the projected demand for blindness and vision impairment services will be met in the medium to long term.

**Recommendation 6:** the employment, recruitment and retention of people who are blind or vision impaired, in all levels of public sector employment and in funded organisations.

**Recommendation 7:** best practice in creating a culturally competent and inclusive aged care workforce by providing adequate funding for cultural competency training by Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations and by supporting the employment, recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in all categories of employment.

**Recommendation 8:** the employment, recruitment and retention of culturally and linguistically diverse people in all categories of employment, including the aged care sector workforce.

**Recommendation 9:** the employment, recruitment and retention of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people in all categories of employment, including the aged care sector workforce.

**Recommendation 10:** the establishment of a collaborative model of service delivery, building on the existing capacity of the community services sector in regional and remote communities.

**Recommendation 11:** increased funding to the Aged Care Workforce Fund to ensure quality service provision.
Responding to the Terms of Reference

a. The current composition of the aged care workforce

In Australia there are more than 40 blindness, vision impairment and rehabilitation service providers who predominately deliver services to clients aged 65 years or older (60 per cent). The recent Snapshot of Blindness and Low Vision Services in Australia (Snapshot Survey) conducted by Vision 2020 Australia, the National Disability Services (NDS) and the Australian Blindness Forum (ABF) found that 60 per cent of blindness and vision impaired clients are aged 65 years or older.¹ Further, figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC) indicate that prevalence of disability increases with age, as does a person’s need for assistance. The findings uncovered higher rates of unmet need amongst those with sensory and speech disabilities at 50.2 per cent.² This focus on the 65 years and over age group for the blindness and vision impairment services sector reflects the ageing Australian population.

The Snapshot Survey reveals a diverse and highly skilled blindness and vision impairment services sector. The sector is predominately comprised of staff with specialist skills, particularly in allied health roles such as optometry, orthoptics and occupational therapy. Further, the sector attracts large numbers of volunteers, corresponding to one-third of the paid workforce and equating to 17,820 hours per week. This is approximately $30 million of unpaid support per year, coordinated and facilitated by participating organisations.³ Services such as those that build new skills for independence in the home, mobility when moving around the community and other ways of reading and writing using braille or magnification are crucial in assisting older Australians to remain independent within their community and improve quality of life.

It is estimated that on average, supporting people who are blind or vision impaired over the age of 65 requires less intense and less frequent interventions than their younger counterparts. This means that, for a relatively small investment, older Australians can remain engaged in their communities, living in their own homes and out of residential care for longer. Yet, while a majority of clients are aged 65 years and older, only a fraction of funding for blindness and vision impairment services is derived from Government funded aged care streams. According to the Snapshot Survey, funding for the blindness and vision impairment services sector generated from all government sources amounts to just 30 per cent of all funding or $56 million.⁴ Government funding streams for the sector are spread across disability, aged care, health and education.

Vision 2020 Australia members working in the blindness and vision impairment sector provide services which are not funded from aged care to people aged 65 years and older living with blindness and vision impairment. These include low vision clinics, information and library services, alternative formats, assistive technology training and advocacy services. The greatest proportion of funding is generated by fundraising and bequests at 43 per cent (nearly $81 million). A further 18 per cent is derived from sales ($34.4 million) and nine per cent ($17.1 million) from investments, grants and other sources.⁵

⁴ Ibid
⁵ Ibid
⁶ Vision 2020 Australia submission to the Senate Inquiry on the future of Australia’s aged care sector workforce
The lack of Government recognition and investment to address blindness and vision impairment as an issue predominately affecting older Australians is of significant concern to the sector. A number of Vision 2020 Australia members are registered aged care service providers, delivering aged care services to older Australians who are blind or vision impaired across Australia. Given the link between ageing and the increased incidence of blindness and vision loss, ensuring access to funded specialist blindness and vision impairment services for older Australians is a crucial aspect of improving the quality of the aged care workforce and ensuring that consumers have equal access to the right services and supports.
b. Future aged care workforce requirements, including the impacts of sector growth, changes in how care is delivered, and increasing competition for workers

**Sector growth**

In 2010, an estimated 575,000 people over the age of 40 were living with blindness or vision impairment across Australia and the majority of these individuals were aged over 65 years. Today, as the population ages and the NDIS is rolled out, demand for blindness and vision impairment services is expected to worsen. An arbitrary age restriction of 65 years for the NDIS will mean that there will be a group of people with a demonstrable functional need who will not be eligible for NDIS supports, but who still may need access to support in some form. It is anticipated that these individuals, aged 65 years and over, will have access to comparable services through the new aged care system.

Should My Aged Care reforms to the Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) achieve their goal of supporting people to age in place and in residential care, access to entry level supports will be streamlined, meaning an increase in referrals from the My Aged Care Gateway to a range of specialist services such as blindness and vision impairment services, orientation and mobility specialists, and other allied health professionals not traditionally associated with the current CHSP workforce. In order to meet this increasing demand it will be essential for the blindness and vision impairment services sector to train, recruit and retain more specialised staff in allied health roles.

The Snapshot Survey reveals a sector that is struggling to recruit and retain specialist staff. According to the results of the survey, half of blindness and vision impairment organisations that recruited in 2013 reported difficulty finding suitably qualified applicants, with orientation and mobility specialists, guide dog instructors, orthoptists, assistive technology consultants and optical dispensers being cited as difficult to recruit. As a result, more than one-quarter (27 per cent) of organisations reported that they have had to refuse services to clients.\(^6\) Organisations that reported they had not been able to meet demand quoted the main impediments as a lack of financial resources to hire staff or being unable to pay staff to work longer hours. The data suggests that the sector is experiencing shortages in workers with specialist skills and that this is only expected to worsen with the roll out of the NDIS and resulting increasing demand.

**Changes in how care is delivered**

The My Aged Care reforms for Home Care and Home Support are moving toward a consumer directed care approach, with a focus on wellness, reablement and restorative care. This is not dissimilar to the values and principles underpinning the NDIS. Vision 2020 Australia supports this intention to transition to a culture that provides consumers with greater flexibility and choice over their individual needs. Person centred care is the basis of quality care and a consumer driven aged care service. It positions the individual at the centre of decision making over the supports they require. A key principle behind a consumer directed care approach is that the quality of a particular service will be determined by the extent to which the service being provided is personalised to the specific needs of each individual. As a result the blindness and vision impairment services sector will need to move to flexible workforce arrangements and service delivery in order to meet the needs of individual consumers. Moreover it will be essential for service providers to market themselves and inform consumers about the benefits of their services.

Vision 2020 Australia notes that for many of our members working within the blindness and vision impairment services sector, the implementation of a consumer directed care approach will be a

new transition. The blindness and vision impairment services sector has traditionally operated under block funding arrangements combined with a reliance on community support derived from philanthropy, fundraising and donations. A shift to a consumer directed care approach whereby funding is tied to the consumer will mean fiscal uncertainty about how services will be delivered. Under block funding arrangements service providers existed to deliver services, a consumer driven market means that providers will exist to meet the needs and demands of consumers. Vision 2020 Australia recommends that information and training forums should begin as early as possible to provide practical training, resources and assistance to service providers in moving to these new arrangements.

It is anticipated that this model of care will be a cultural, system, capacity and skills adjustment. Future workers in the blindness and vision impairment services sector will require support in terms of funding and time to transition to the new system as well as training to navigate the My Aged Care gateway. Vision 2020 Australia therefore recommends investment in practical training forums and resources to support transitioning to a consumer directed care model.

**Recommendation 1**

Vision 2020 Australia recommends the Committee support investment in practical training forums and resources to support transitioning to a consumer directed care model.

**Increasing competition for workers**

Current reforms to disability and aged care will change the way the services are delivered and funded. A consumer directed care approach whereby choice will be in the hands of the consumer will mean uncertainty of funding and increased competition within the blindness and vision impairment services sector. For the first time services may be obliged to market themselves to demonstrate consumer value. Services will need to change how they deliver services, building a competitive advantage by differentiating or specialising to suit consumer needs. It is anticipated that current reforms will result in new for-profit competitors entering the sector with the potential to offer services not currently available. The blindness and vision impairment services sector may respond to increased competition in one of two ways, namely; diversifying and offering a range of services or specialising in services. A workforce that is well trained and able to adjust how they deliver services according to consumer needs will be fundamental to sustaining the blindness and vision impairment services sector.

The National Disability Services Business Confidence Survey of the Disability Services Sector (Business Confidence Survey) reports that with the roll out of the NDIS, 63 per cent of organisations experienced increased competition and 80 per cent anticipate increased competition in the future. As a result, service providers are looking to collaboration as a strategy for being flexible and responsive in a changing and competitive funding environment. Further, over the past six months, one in five organisations (23 per cent) had entered into a joint working relationship, including partnerships, consortiums and mergers. Larger organisations were most likely to collaborate. It is anticipated that this will be replicated as the aged care sector transitions to a new form of person centred care. Uncertain funding and increased competition are of significant concern to smaller blindness and vision impairment service providers. These new alliances and partnerships between larger organisations have the potential to result in a market which is dominated by just a few large service providers, threatening smaller specialised service providers and quality of service for consumers.

The blindness and vision impairment services sector will need to take a strategic approach to workforce development. In particular, smaller service providers will need to review their operations and potentially explore other business options to survive. In order to meet these

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8 Vision 2020 Australia submission to the Senate Inquiry on the future of Australia’s aged care sector workforce
challenges Vision 2020 Australia recommends the implementation of specific safeguards and regulations to work against the monopoly effect. These safeguards will work to ensure that the market contains the full range of service options wherever possible so that consumers have real choice and control over the services and supports they need to remain independent and engaged with the community.

**Recommendation 2**

Vision 2020 Australia recommends the Committee support implementation of specific safeguards and regulations to ensure against the monopoly effect to enable consumer choice.
c. The interaction of aged care workforce needs with employment by the broader community services sector, including workforce needs in disability, health and other areas, and increased employment as the National Disability Insurance Scheme rolls out

The community aged care workforce is part of a broader group which incorporates all workers involved in the delivery of community care services, including disability services. The blindness and vision impairment services sector can be understood as a specialist section of the broader community aged care workforce. Due to the specialised nature of the sector there are difficulties in attracting and retaining workers. This is evidenced in the results of the Snapshot Survey, with half of responding organisations that recruited in 2013 reporting difficulty finding suitably qualified applicants. Orientation and mobility specialists, guide dog instructors, orthoptists, assistive technology consultants and optical dispensers were cited as the most difficult to recruit. The Snapshot Survey suggests that the sector is experiencing shortages in workers with specialist skills and that this is an impediment to service growth. This shortage is expected to intensify as the demand for aged care, disability care and health care services increases and the broader Australian labour market is condensed as a result of population ageing.

Difficulties in recruiting to the blindness and vision impairment services sector are due in part to remuneration issues combined with a lack of education pathways, professional development and training options. For example, qualifying as an orientation and mobility instructor often requires completion of an undergraduate degree followed by a graduate diploma in Orientation and Mobility. The graduate diploma is offered by a small number of institutions, limiting the number of qualified graduates. Experienced orientation and mobility instructors can then go on to apply for a Guide Dog Cadetship to become guide dog instructors. This additional training can take several years of on-the-job training. Vision 2020 Australia believes there is a role for the Australian Government in supporting the delivery of quality education and training, reducing unnecessary regulatory burdens and increasing education pathways to the blindness and vision impairment services sector to ensure that services are available to meet consumer demands.

**Recommendation 3**

Vision 2020 Australia recommends the Committee support the delivery of quality education and training for the blindness and vision impairment services sector, reducing unnecessary regulatory burdens and increasing education pathways to the blindness and vision impairment services sector.

In terms of remuneration, the average salary of a professional working in the blindness and vision impairment services sector is $65,000, please note this excludes optometrists. This relatively low remuneration for the blindness and vision impairment services sector is a key issue in attracting and retaining workers. An increase in the level of remuneration would have a positive flow on effect to other issues affecting the sector. For example, improved wages would enhance the perception of the blindness and vision impairment sector as an area where service delivery work is valued. In addition, the quality and continuity of care for consumers would increase as workers are more satisfied with their work, and thus likely to remain in the sector, reducing turnover. In turn, this may allow for organisational funding to be targeted towards on the job education, training and upskilling, rather than basic training for new workers.

It is the position of Vision 2020 Australia that improving the attractiveness and retention of the blindness and vision impairment services sector and developing a sustainable workforce to meet the future demands of an ageing population will require a dynamic industry development strategy with adequate funding. A macro-level industry development strategy, led by the Australian Government, service providers and consumers will map out how the projected demand for blindness and vision impairment services will be met in the medium to long term and
ensure workforce, financial and policy harmonisation. Such a strategy will provide further opportunities for education, training and skills development and competitively renumerated staff. This would result in a workforce that is sufficiently skilled, appropriately qualified, attracted to and retained and respected for their work in the blindness and vision impairment services sector. In turn, developing a sustainable workforce would ensure that people who are blind or vision impaired are able to access the appropriate supports and services to remain independent and live the life of their choosing.

**Recommendation 4**

Vision 2020 Australia recommends the Committee support the investment and development of a macro-level industry development strategy to enhance and support a sustainable quality workforce in the blindness and vision impairment services sector.

The Australian Government has an integral role to play in facilitating and driving an industry development strategy for the blindness and vision impairment services sector. Government policy has the potential to affect the quantity and quality of labour supply in a number of ways. A comprehensive policy approach can remove obstacles which discourage people to undertake work and instead encourage them to enter the workforce. It can also provide incentives such as flexible working arrangements for employees who are under-employed, such as part time or casual staff, to increase the hours that they work. Government policy also has a role in providing quality education and promoting skill development in areas lacking capacity. This can lead to a workforce that is both qualified and capable to respond to the needs of the community.

The blindness and vision impairment services sector requires a sophisticated approach to workforce planning in order to understand the impact of changes to aged care, the number of workers required and the qualifications required to meet the projected demand for services. The Australian Government previously recognised the importance of workforce planning with the development of the National Aged Care Workforce Strategy covering residential aged care in 2005. However this document is no longer current and is not inclusive of the blindness and vision impairment services sector, community care, allied health and supplementary workers.

The sector must work with government and other stakeholders to develop an overarching strategy for future workforce growth in the blindness and vision impairment services sector. A comprehensive workforce strategy for the sector needs to be driven by the Government and independently developed to identify and address ongoing and future workforce issues. The first step in the development of this strategy will be the establishment of a government advisory committee comprised of consumer representatives, service providers and departmental staff to report to the Minister responsible on how the projected demand for blindness and vision impairment services will be met in the medium to long term.

**Recommendation 5**

Vision 2020 Australia recommends the Committee support the establishment of a government advisory committee; comprised of consumer representatives, service providers and departmental staff, to report to the Minister responsible on how the projected demand for blindness and vision impairment services will be met in the medium to long term.
d. Challenges in attracting and retaining aged care workers

The blindness and vision impairment services sector will require a significant increase in workforce over the next ten years in order to meet the demands of the ageing Australian population. The Business Confidence Survey reports that the most difficult job to recruit is permanent allied health staff, consistent with findings from the Snapshot Survey. According to the Business Confidence Survey, in order to sustain growth many organisations reported increasing their number of casual staff. This increasing number of casual staff is of concern to the blindness and vision impairment services sector, as an overreliance on casual staff to cope with increasing consumer demand has the potential to lead to a reduction in service quality and a high staff turnover rate.

Opportunities for skills development and career paths are important characteristics of the blindness and vision impairment services sector that can be improved to attract and retain a highly skilled workforce and to develop management skills. Career pathways are integral to retention strategies and it is therefore important for the blindness and vision impairment services sector to work closely with vocational education and training providers. For example, graduate optometry education could promote the blindness and vision impairment services sector positively as an industry within which to develop a career through advanced placement. The introduction of graduate electives that offer students the opportunity to undertake low vision education, training and placements would also incentivise the workforce. However, as mentioned previously the sector must also have incentives to develop their skills and this is not currently reflected in remuneration patterns. As per recommendation four, attracting and retaining workers to the blindness and vision impairment services sector will require the development of a macro-level industry development strategy.

Vision 2020 Australia considers that the Australian Government should, as a priority, work to advance the employment, recruitment and retention of people with disability, in particular people who are blind or vision impaired, in all levels of public sector employment and in funded organisations, as outlined in the National Disability Strategy. Vision 2020 Australia notes that building the capacity of people who are blind or vision impaired, for example directly supporting an increase in workforce numbers; education and training programs; scholarships and traineeships; health professional placements and work experience is essential in creating an inclusive workforce and building the capacity of individuals for self-direction and self-advocacy.

It is anticipated that current reforms to disability and aged care will result in new businesses entering the sector with the potential to offer services not currently available. Now, more than ever, is the time for the Australian Government to encourage and support innovative approaches to employment such as social enterprises, small businesses or initiatives to assist people with disability to establish their own business, as outlined in the National Disability Strategy. Vision 2020 Australia considers that governments at all levels should provide assistance to private and small business to develop practical and sector specific workplace strategies and disability action plans to enable the meaningful employment of people who are blind or vision impaired.

**Recommendation 6**

Vision 2020 Australia recommends the Committee support the employment, recruitment and retention of people who are blind or vision impaired, in all levels of public sector employment and in funded organisations.

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9 Ibid.

j. Challenges of creating a culturally competent and inclusive aged care workforce to cater for the different care needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse groups and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people

The 2008 National Indigenous Eye Health Survey determined that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have six times the rate of blindness and three times the rate of vision loss than the broader population.\(^{10}\) Older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have poorer health and higher rates of disability than other Australians in the same age group. Additionally, because many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in remote areas, providing appropriate and accessible blindness and vision impairment services presents a major challenge. Ensuring that consumers receive adequate, culturally and linguistically sensitive access to eye health and vision care services is essential to addressing preventable and treatable vision loss and ensuring independence and quality of life. Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (ACCHOs) are integral to ensure better care and links with the blindness and vision impairment services sector. ACCHOs exist to deliver holistic, comprehensive and culturally appropriate health care and thus play an essential role in ensuring that consumers receive culturally and linguistically appropriate access to services. Best practice in creating a culturally competent workforce will be for the blindness and vision impairment services sector to collaborate and work closely with ACCHOs to draw on this expertise. In order to facilitate this Vision 2020 Australia recommends that adequate funding for cultural competency training by ACCHOs is essential.

Implementing programs that build on the capacity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in all levels of employment, including in the blindness and vision impairment sector, for example directly supporting the increase in the workforce numbers; education and training programs; scholarships and traineeships, health professional placements, work experience and curriculum development are essential in creating a culturally competent and inclusive workforce. For example, building professional placements for optometrists in rural and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities would increase cultural sensitivity and awareness, creating a workforce which is responsive and fully equipped to deal with the different needs of consumers.

Vision 2020 Australia considers it critical that the Australian Government should work to advance the employment, recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in all categories of employment, including the aged care sector workforce.

**Recommendation 7**

Vision 2020 Australia recommends the Committee support best practice in creating a culturally competent and inclusive aged care workforce by providing adequate funding for cultural competency training by Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations and by supporting the employment, recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in all categories of employment.

Additionally, according to data from the Institute of Health and Welfare the proportion of the population aged 65 and over that was born outside of Australia in 2014 was 28 per cent with the proportion of this population growing at a faster rate than the general population.\(^{11}\) Implementing programs that build on the capacity of culturally and linguistically diverse people in all levels of employment, including in the blindness and vision impairment sector is thus essential in creating a culturally competent and inclusive workforce.

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Finally, it is estimated that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people make up 11 per cent of the population. Yet they are often neglected in Australian research and monitoring. Many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex older Australians currently accessing aged care services have experienced discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status. Therefore, implementing programs that build on the capacity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people in all levels of employment, including in the blindness and vision impairment sector is essential in creating an inclusive workforce.

**Recommendation 8**

Vision 2020 Australia recommends the Committee support the employment, recruitment and retention of culturally and linguistically diverse people in all categories of employment, including the aged care sector workforce.

**Recommendation 9**

Vision 2020 Australia recommends the Committee support the employment, recruitment and retention of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people in all categories of employment, including the aged care sector workforce.

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14 Vision 2020 Australia submission to the Senate Inquiry on the future of Australia’s aged care sector workforce.
k. The particular aged care workforce challenges in regional towns and remote communities

While the blindness and vision impairment services sector is experiencing increasing difficulties in attracting and retaining staff required to provide critical services, workforce shortages are more acute in rural and remote areas. These shortages have the potential to impact on the quantity and quality of care available for older Australians who are blind or vision impaired. Workforce shortages in the sector may jeopardise continuity of care and early intervention, thereby affecting older people’s capacity to continue to live at home and thereby increasing entrance into high cost residential care. Some of the challenges for the blindness and vision impairment services sector employed in regional, rural and remote communities includes: significant travel; isolation; lack of supervision or support; and limited access to training.

Additionally, due to smaller communities, the prevalence of blindness and vision impairment is often low in regional and remote areas. A low uptake of consumers means that many blindness and vision impairment services are not able to maintain adequate service provision. Further, a lack of alternative providers in regional and remote communities means that small providers may be required to support consumers to a higher level and establish costly outreach services without additional funding.

In responding to these issues in the short term, Vision 2020 Australia recommends the implementation of adequate remuneration packages, incentives as well as lifelong learning opportunities including formal and informal education and training to attract and retain staff to regional and remote communities. Additionally services for individuals who live in remote locations where there are fewer personnel may be facilitated through better telemedicine processes. Telemedicine may allow specialist personnel to provide some services remotely, minimising delays due to travel by either the patient or the specialists.

In order to meet these challenges in the medium to long term, Vision 2020 Australia recommends the establishment of a collaborative model of service delivery. This model of service delivery should build on the existing capacity of the community services sector to ensure that the full range of blindness and vision impairment services is built into existing services and made available to consumers. Collaboration between service providers will be crucial to ensure adequate service provision and services will require support in terms of time, training and funding. The first step in a collaborative model of service delivery will be to map out and investigate existing relationships between organisations to determine any gaps and overlaps in service delivery. Collaborative action and coordination will ensure planning capacity for blindness and vision impairment workforce development.

**Recommendation 10**

Vision 2020 Australia recommends the Committee support the establishment of a collaborative model of service delivery, building on the existing capacity of the community services sector in regional and remote communities.
1. Impact of the Government’s cuts to the Aged Care Workforce Fund

Vision 2020 Australia supports the Aged Care Workforce Fund (the Workforce Fund) in its intent to improve the quality of aged care by developing the skills and capacity of the workforce. The Workforce Fund focuses on knowledge transfer, capacity building and innovation through the provision of access to education, training and fostering collaborative partnerships. The Workforce Fund is integral to upskilling, training and retention of staff within the aged care workforce, ensuring the workforce is able to meet the demands of an ageing population. In particular, Vision 2020 Australia commends the Workforce Fund for its intent to provide targeted training and development strategies for priority groups, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Given the importance of this initiative, Vision 2020 Australia is concerned about the recent government funding cuts to the Workforce Fund. Reduced funding for targeted training and upskilling is troubling, given that the demand for blindness and vision impairment services is expected to increase and that the sector will need to train, recruit and retain more specialised staff. Funding cuts to the Workforce Fund have the potential to reduce the quality of services and supports for people who are blind or vision impaired. Vision 2020 Australia therefore considers it critical that the Australian Government continue to provide adequate funding to ensure the good work of the Workforce Fund.

**Recommendation 11**

Vision 2020 Australia recommends the Committee support increased funding to the Aged Care Workforce Fund to ensure quality service provision.
Conclusion

The blindness and vision impairment services sector is feeling significant financial and workforce pressures as it adapts to a changing environment affected by disability and aged care reforms. Increasing market demand coupled with a sector largely constituted by specialist personnel, will require the development of an industry development strategy to ensure workforce, financial and policy harmonisation.

Vision 2020 Australia appreciates the opportunity to provide comment to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee on this important issue, and welcomes any further participation and discussion on what is an important matter to the blindness and vision impairment services sector.