

## Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, Final Report 2021 - Overview of key recommendations relevant to eye sector

The final report from the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety echoes many of the issues raised by our sector. The Commissioners advocate strongly for a system which prioritises "care, dignity and respect" for older Australians.

Some of the major weaknesses they see in the current system are summarised in Section 1.2 of Volume 1, and described in detail in Volume 2. Those most relevant to our sector include:

- Inequity for people with disabilities
- Lack of culturally safe services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- Difficulty accessing services in rural and remote areas, despite higher concentration of older population
- Problems with accessing healthcare in both home and residential settings
- Difficulty entering the system via My Aged Care
- Long waiting lists for home care packages causing premature residential care entry and other adverse outcomes.

The Commissioners offer a series of recommendations which collectively would create a new aged care system, including:

- a new Aged Care Act (Recommendation 1)
- a clear set of rights it should uphold, and principles which should underpin it (Recommendations 2 and 3), which seek to protect the autonomy and individuality of older Australians and ensure that they get the supports they need.
- creation of a "National Aged Care Strategy" (Recommendation 4)
- an Aged Care Commission (Recommendation 5) to hold the system accountable.

### Impacts for older Australians who are blind or have low vision

The report concludes that the current aged care system discriminates against people with disabilities, and proposes a series of reforms to improve equity of access.

Key recommendations that have the potential to address long-standing issues the sector has raised in relation to older Australians who are blind or have low vision include:

- An assistive technology and home modifications category within the aged care program that promotes independence and reduces risks (Recommendation 34)
- Creating equivalence between the supports that people receive through the aged care system and the NDIS (Recommendation 72)
- Annual reporting to parliament by Disability Discrimination and Age Discrimination Commissioners on people receiving disability supports in aged care (Recommendation 73)

- Funding for recipients of care at home that is based on assessment of needs, up to the maximum funding amount for residential care recipients (Recommendation 119)
- Co-payment or contribution requirements to be abolished for Recipients of assistive technology and home care supports (Recommendation 125).

## A New Aged Care Program

The report proposes the creation, by July 2024, of a unified aged care program combining the Commonwealth Home Support, Home Care, and Residential Aged Care programs (Recommendation 25).

Chapter 4 describes the proposed design of this program, some of which would establish features similar to those found in the NDIS. Recommendation 26 highlights the need for improved public awareness of the system, and Recommendation 27 advocates for accessibility and usability of information.

Most relevant to current sector priorities, however, may be the proposal for a new, streamlined assessment process for entry to the system, described in Recommendation 28. This system would:

- Use assessors independent of approved aged care providers to ensure providers can't decide funding levels (providers can offer specialist input but decision makers to be independent)
- Use multidisciplinary teams for more complex needs
- Promote the autonomy of the recipient
- Provide a recipient with assessment results including their level of funding
- Include assessment of the need for care management and the needs of informal carers.

## Improved Access to Healthcare

Service providers have highlighted extensive barriers to the delivery of preventative vision care and/or treatment in the aged care sector. While not mentioning eye health specifically, the Royal Commission's final report agrees that both in home and residential care systems, older Australians are struggling to access health care. Chapter 9 of the recommendations offers more detail, but some relevant recommendations include:

- A trial of a primary healthcare model, including accredited aged care general practices (Recommendation 56)
- The establishment of multi-disciplinary local hospital-like outreach services to facilitate access to specialists for all aged care clients (Recommendation 58)
- Improved access to mental health services for older Australians (Recommendation 59)
- Creation of temporary new Medicare Benefits Schedule items for people living in home and residential care (Recommendation 61)
- Enhancements to the rural health outreach fund to improve access for people in regional, rural, or remote areas (Recommendation 62)
- Improved access to specialist telehealth services via MBS items and improvements to settings in residential care (Recommendation 63).

## Improved Training for Aged Care Workers

Recommendations regarding planning and development of the aged care workforce could complement the sector's advocacy efforts to improve knowledge among aged care workers around vision loss. These include:

- Establishment of an Aged Care Workforce Planning Division within the Department of Health (Recommendation 75)
- A national multimedia campaign to raise awareness of opportunities in the aged care workforce (Recommendation 76)
- Regular reviews of certificate-based courses in aged care, and what additional competencies should be added to these (Recommendation 79)
- Improved training for aged care workers through short courses and micro-credentials (Recommendation 81) and funding for teaching programs (Recommendation 83).

## Other Relevant Recommendations

The report recommends improvements to service delivery in rural and remote areas through recognising and addressing thin markets (Recommendation 54) and improvements to the Multi-purpose services program (Recommendation 55).

Chapter 7 details new system settings for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including:

- A specific aged care pathway for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (Recommendation 47)
- Requirement for all government employees within aged care system to be trained in cultural safety and trauma informed service delivery (Recommendation 48)
- A National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged care workforce plan (Recommendation 51).

Chapters 15 and 16 detail research and innovation opportunities for the sector, including the establishment of an Aged Care Research and Innovation Fund (Recommendation 107), a national Aged Care Data asset (Recommendation 108), and improvements to ICT within the sector (Recommendation 109).