

Comment

Vision for aged care needed from new government

WITH THE election behind us, it is time for the new government to face up to the challenge of making aged care better for all Australians.

I would like to congratulate the Prime Minister on the Coalition's election win and I look forward to working with the new government to make aged care better for older Australians.

There are around 90,000 people receiving subsidised care and services via a home care package, while a further 128,000 people sit on the home care queue often waiting more than 12 months for care.

And whilst the home care queue continues to grow, a funding crisis is unfolding in residential care with an estimated 45 per cent of all facilities operating at a loss due to the combination of rising costs and stagnant subsidies.

How we respond to these challenges will reflect who we are as a nation. A piecemeal approach will just not cut it.

Our nation's success in enabling people to live longer, healthier and more productive lives is a good thing. We need to find new and better ways to meet the changing needs and expectations of growing numbers of older Australians who are more discerning in the services they desire and how these enable them to live with age well.

A revolution is happening – from aged care to ageing well.

As a key driver of reform, the royal commission offers our nation and our industry the opportunity to reflect deeply and ultimately make the aged care system better. However, while the commission is doing its important work we must not lose sight of making our aged care system better right now.

We all want a high performing, world-class quality aged care system. The industry recognises that safety and quality are not negotiable and is working



Sean Rooney, CEO of LASA

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hard to implement the new aged care quality standards, commencing 1 July.

World-class quality requires world-class resourcing. That is, world-class staffing and funding.

As a nation, we must commit to the growth and development of a highly-skilled and accountable aged care workforce. The work of the Aged Care Workforce Strategy is fundamental to achieving this.

Not only must this government commit to rapid and fundamental funding reform if we are to meet the changing needs and expectations of the growing numbers of older Australians, it must work with the aged care sector on a cohesive vision for aged services that enables older Australians to age well.

We all want a safe, high-quality, high-performing and sustainable aged care system. Older Australians need it, and older Australians deserve nothing less. ■

Aged care needs to focus on sexuality in terms of intimacy

THIS YEAR'S Australian Association of Gerontology 2019 Glenda Powell Travelling Fellowship focuses on intimacy and ageing, which is a topic very close to my heart.

I have been promoting older people's sexual rights for more than 30 years as a nurse working in residential aged care, an educator, researcher and academic.

Over that time, I've witnessed a shift from a focus on 'inappropriate sexual behaviour' to sexual wellbeing and sexual rights.

While our perspectives continue to shift, conversations about sexuality are still often limited to sex, and sexual consent in residential aged care.

In contrast, many older people have told me that we need to focus on sexuality in



Dr Catherine Barrett, AAG 2019 Glenda Powell Travelling Fellow

the broadest context in terms of intimacy.

For the last four years I have been talking to older people about what intimacy means to them and how it is renegotiated in the context of disease, disability and changes in relationship status.

The aspects of intimacy older people raise are broad and include topics such as:

- skin hunger
- connection
- desire
- communication
- pleasure
- power
- consent
- safer sex
- sexually transmissible infections
- sexopharmaceuticals
- online dating
- negotiating new relationships.

These topics now form the foundation of Intimacy Bank, an innovative approach to promoting intimacy and connection for older people.

At the heart of the Intimacy Bank approach is a series of information sheets developed in consultation with older people and service providers.

Service providers and older

people are then supported to deliver workshops built around the information sheets, in which older people are supported to develop their own intimacy wellbeing plan.

As part of the travelling fellowship, I will be talking to service providers about Intimacy Bank and asking for their ideas on aspects of intimacy that need to be promoted.

Such an approach, drawing on the expertise of service providers and older people, is expected to build the confidence and capacity of AAG members and other service providers to promote older people's wellbeing and social connection by focusing on intimacy. ■

