

Australian aged care gets Booster dose

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By 2057, it is projected that there will be 8.8 million older people in Australia (22 per cent of the population); by 2097, 12.8 million people (25 per cent) will be aged 65 and over according to Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2017. Looking at the growing trend, the government of Australia has a separate ministry for Senior Australians and Aged Care Services and undertaken many steps to support them with respect, care and dignity



The Australian Government has taken an important step to deliver its reforms to aged care by introducing the first legislation in response to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. The Aged Care and Other Legislation Amendment (Royal Commission Response No. 1) Bill 2021 has been introduced into Parliament on May 27, 2021, and makes necessary changes to current aged care legislation, ahead of the new Aged Care Act planned for 2023.

This bill is the first step in the Government's five year, five pillar, aged care reform plan addressing home care, residential aged care services and sustainability, residential care quality and safety, workforce and governance. The health, safety and wellbeing of senior Australians is of the utmost importance to the government, and is driving its plan for generational change of the aged care sector.

Minister for Health and Aged Care, Greg Hunt, said that the amendments will deliver immediate priority changes around restrictive practices, home care assurance reviews, and repeal the Aged Care Financing Authority. "Regulating the use of restrictive practices, like chemical and physical restraint, is a critical focus for the Australian Government to improve quality and safety of aged care", Minister Hunt said.

"Addressing concerns raised by the Royal Commission and the independent review into restraint, our amendments will mean from July 1, we will have clearly defined restrictive practices, which align with the definitions used in the disability sector. We are strengthening legislation to ensure that restrictive practices are only used as a last resort, the impact on the care recipient is considered, and consent arrangements are clear," said Hunt.

To support the legislative changes, the government will appoint a Senior Practitioner to the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (the Commission) later this year to lead an education campaign to minimise the use of restrictive practices and provide senior Australians and their families with an independent review mechanism. The bill will also expand the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commissioner's ability to respond to, and issue civil penalties for, breaches of approved providers' responsibilities in relation to restrictive practices.

Minister for Senior Australians and Aged Care Services, Richard Colbeck, said that the bill introduces reviews to ensure the arrangements for the delivery and administration of home care are effective and efficient. "The Australian Government wants to see the continuous improvement of home care services, through better policy, improved practices and provider-led enhancements," Minister Colbeck said.

"These assurance reviews will be run through the Department of Health, and while they will complement the work of the Commission, they won't duplicate it. This will also permit information to be shared with the Commission if issues of compliance are detected. Assurance reviews will target a number of possible scenarios, including the use of home care subsidies and home care recipient charges, the nature of home care services, and provider dealings with home care recipients," Minister Colbeck said.

The bill will also remove the legislative requirement for the Minister to establish an Aged Care Financing Authority (ACFA). Minister Hunt said that the changing nature of aged care means the way the system functions, including governance, must change to remain relevant and effective.

"ACFA has provided valuable advice and insight to the Government, however our fundamental reform and our progress towards a new aged care system, means now is the time to update governance arrangements," Minister Hunt said and added that ACFA will be replaced with a new advisory group on aged care financing issues, made up of aged care sector representatives and the Department of Health, providing relevant and timely advice as needed.

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