



PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA

Your Government Media Contact

ROYAL COMMISSION INTO AGED CARE QUALITY AND SAFETY

MEDIA RELEASE

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Prime Minister, Minister for Health, Minister for Senior Australians and Aged Care

Health and Social Services

Today, I am announcing the Government's decision for me to ask the Governor General to establish a Royal Commission into the Aged Care sector.

This Royal Commission will primarily look at the quality of care provided in Residential and Home Aged Care to senior Australians, but also include Young Australians with disabilities living in Residential Aged Care settings.

We are committed to providing older Australians with access to care that supports their dignity and recognises the contribution that they have made to society.

Funding for aged care is at record levels. In 2017-18, alone, aged care spending is estimated to reach \$18.6 billion. Over the next five years funding will grow by \$5 billion to \$23.6 billion.

\$1.6 billion has been provided to create an additional 20,000 higher needs home care packages since last December. In excess of \$50 million is being provided every year for dementia-specific programs. And in my last budget, a further \$5.3 million has been committed over four years to pilot improvements to care for people living with

dementia, with an emphasis on use of innovative technologies.

Our aged care sector in Australia provides some of the best care in the world. And we are looked to as a leader in the field. Aged care services and training has become an important service export industry for Australia.

There are thousands of extraordinary operators, facilities, care providers, nursing and other clinical staff, volunteers, cleaners, cooks, therapists out there improving the lives of senior Australians every day. They do it for love and out of a deep professional commitment.

But the best teams will always want to do better, and will always want to be honest about the performance of the sector as a whole. If you care about aged care, which those who work in the sector do, you will want it to be at its very best.

Next week will mark twelve months since South Australia's Oakden aged care facility was closed.

When the Oakden tragedy was revealed publicly in May 2017, Minister Ken Wyatt commissioned a review into quality across the aged care sector and asked for increased inspection and compliance work.

We have already taken steps to improve the system. In 2017 we commissioned the Review of National Aged Care Quality Regulatory Processes.

We have worked through the 2017 Legislated Review of Aged Care, and responded in the 2018 Budget with the More Choices for a Longer Life package that encouraged active ageing and provided an extra \$1.6 billion for home care.

We have legislated for new Aged Care Quality Standards, the first upgrade of standards in 20 years, and introduced a Bill to create the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission, supported by \$106 million to support better facilities, care and standards in aged care.

When I became Prime Minister just over three weeks ago, I was advised that as a result of the increased audit work we had commissioned as a Government to deal with this problem, the Department of Health has closed almost one aged care service per month since Oakden, with an increasing number under sanction to improve their care.

Putting in place clear requirements for better standards and providing the resources and powers to police those standards will always shine a light on the problems that exist. That is the whole point. These findings demonstrate the effectiveness of the measures we have been taking.

However, incidences of older people being hurt by failures of care simply cannot be explained or excused. We must be assured about how widespread these cases are. I also want to be assured about the care provided to younger Australians living in the residential aged care facilities.

As a community we expect high standards for the quality and safety of aged care services. Our Government shares these expectations. This Royal Commission will be about proactively determining what we need to do in the future to ensure these expectations can be met.

If you want to deal with a problem, you have to be fair dinkum about understanding the full extent of it. Whether there is a crisis in aged care or not is to be determined. That is the point of holding a Royal Commission. It is not to pre-determine outcomes.

The evidence shows that the problems are not restricted to any one part of the aged care sector, whether it is for profit or not for profit, large or small facilities, regional or major metropolitan. The Royal Commission will look at the sector as a whole, without bias or prejudice. It will make findings on the evidence. As a Government, and a Parliament, it will be our job to act on these findings together.

What matters most is fixing and getting ahead of the problems.

We also need to get a better handle on what more needs to be done to prepare the system for the increase in demand that will occur in the next decade as the 'baby boomer' generation reaches an age where they will need support from the aged care system.

With more Australians exercising their choice to stay at home for longer, this means that when Australians are entering residential aged care these days they are doing so with more acute needs. This will continue to have a big impact on our residential aged care model in the future. We need to get ahead of this.

Despite the further reforms underway, including the coming establishment of a new Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission, there clearly remains areas of concern with regard to the quality and safety of aged care services.

For this reason, our Government has decided to establish a Royal Commission into Australia's aged care system. I should stress that conducting the Royal Commission will not impact any existing or planned actions to improve the standards and quality of care being provided in aged care facilities. We need to continue to get on with these initiatives.

The Royal Commission will be in addition to, not instead of, the actions we are taking.

Australians must be able to trust that their loved ones will be cared for appropriately and the community should have confidence in the system.

The Terms of Reference will be determined in consultation with the community, including residents and their families and aged care providers. We expect that it will cover:

The quality of care provided to older Australians, and the extent of substandard care;

- The challenge of providing care to Australians with disabilities living in residential aged care, particularly younger people with disabilities;
- The challenge of supporting the increasing number of Australians suffering dementia and addressing their care needs as they age;
- The future challenges and opportunities for delivering aged care services in the context of changing demographics, including in remote, rural and regional Australia;
- Any other matters that the Royal Commission considers necessary.



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