



Opening Statement:
Tracey Buton, Uniting NSW.ACT

Thank you, Chair, and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to appear today to discuss the Aged Care Bill 2024.

I want to acknowledge the Awabakal and Worimi people, the first peoples of the land on which we meet on today, and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their elders, past, present and emerging as well as any First Nation's people here today.

I am Tracey Burton, and I am the Chief Executive of Uniting NSW.ACT.

Uniting is a not for profit organisation, dedicated to supporting the health and wellbeing of older Australians across New South Wales and the ACT, empowering them to live the life they choose. We provide residential aged care, home care, and retirement village services, alongside broader advocacy, community services, and spiritual care as part of the mission of the Uniting Church.

We are a member of the UnitingCare Australia network, one of the largest aged care providers in the country.

In NSW and the ACT, we support over 15,000 seniors through our residential, home care, and retirement services, with a workforce of more than 11,000 staff, including 7,500 who are dedicated to supporting older Australians.

We believe that all people, as they age, deserve dignity, compassion, and the ability to fully exercise their rights as members of our society. At Uniting, we advocate for a sustainable, future-ready aged care system - one that meets the needs of older Australians and adequately supports providers and their workforce to deliver the highest quality care.

The Aged Care Bill represents a landmark opportunity to reform the system, and we welcome its introduction to Parliament. We urge the Bill's passage before the end of this parliamentary term.

Older Australians and the sector have waited more than three years since the Aged Care Royal Commission's final report for this crucial next step, and it's critical that we move forward with these long-overdue reforms.

We have outlined in our submission some recommendations for amendments to the Bill; to strengthen the legislation and ensure we meet the goals of the new Act. Should these amendments not be achieved, we would still support the passage of the Bill in its current form.

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With the expansion of co-contributions for older Australians with means, we urge the Committee to ensure that this does not inadvertently reduce the availability of residential aged care for those without the capacity to pay.

The Government has announced that fully supported full pensioners will not pay additional fees under the new structure, accounting for approximately one in four residents across the sector. For not-for-profit organisations like Uniting, that represents almost half of our residents.

At Uniting, we support people with means contributing more to aged care. We also seek to disrupt entrenched disadvantage, and we are concerned that these reforms, while important and required, might unintentionally disincentivise providers from accepting supported residents, particularly as the sector aims to recover from a long period of financial instability.

To ensure these supported residents are not disadvantaged, we believe that there should be an increase to the accommodation supplement from the inception of the new Act. This would ensure that the supplement remains competitive with daily accommodation payments and reduce the incentive to only accept residents who can afford to pay.

Further, we recommend a review of the adequacy of the 40% supported ratio to consider how it can better support providers so they continue to accept these supported residents into the future.

The Bill's grandfathering provisions keep current aged care clients on existing payment models. This includes grandfathering of Home Care clients that transition into Residential Aged Care, which could potentially cover a span of 20 years or more. While Uniting supports the need for some grandfathering, this must be balanced with the complexity it will create for providers in managing dual systems.

We recommend that existing Residential Aged Care clients be completely grandfathered but that Home Care clients be grandfathered for a maximum of three years with only the existing lifetime co-contribution cap being grandfathered for existing Home Care clients after 3 years or if they move into Residential Aged Care.

We are also advocating for a six-month transition period, bolstered by appropriate sector financial assistance for necessary system uplifts and training, to ensure that no older Australian is disadvantaged as the sector adapts to the new requirements of the Act.

Our priority is to ensure a smooth, well-supported transition that continues to deliver high-quality care for all seniors.

Thank you, and I look forward to our discussion.