

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health and Aged Care

Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs Legislation Committee

Inquiry into the Aged Care Bill 2024 (Provisions)

03 October 2024

PDR Number: IQ24-000161

Government improvement of access to aged care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Written

Senator: Marielle Smith

Question:

What is the government doing to improve access to aged care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Answer:

The Aged Care Bill 2024 (the Bill) supports the ongoing delivery of Commonwealth funded aged care services for older First Nations people. It also provides a framework under which the Department of Health and Aged Care (department) can continue to work with First Nations people and communities to improve access to services.

The Bill embeds culturally safe, trauma aware and healing informed assessment and services in key elements such as the Statements of Rights and Principles, and in the strengthened aged care standards. It recognises that older First Nations people must access quality, culturally safe care wherever they live and aims to reduce access barriers, such as providing alternative entry pathways into aged care.

- A definition of cultural safety, developed by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ageing and Aged Care Council, has been included in the Explanatory Memorandum to support these aspects of the Bill.
- Further, a permanent First Nations Aged Care Commissioner role is expected to be legislated, pending decisions of government on the outcomes of consultations finalised in mid-2024. This role is critical for system accountability to embed cultural safety.

The new Aged Care Act (the new Act) will also enable existing flexible funding arrangements for the provision of funded aged care services to First Nations people to continue, consistent with the recommendations of the Aged Care Taskforce. This includes:

- block-funding for specialist aged care programs in thin markets including the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care Program (NATSIFACP), and
- additional, or varied, funding arrangements for services delivered through mainstream aged care programs in these areas.

Alongside the drafting of the Rules for the new Act, the department will continue to consult and co-design with relevant First Nations stakeholders to ensure service delivery impacts are properly understood and addressed.

This includes ensuring the design of reforms to in-home aged care meet the needs of First Nations people, and that new system entry and assessment arrangements are culturally safe.

- For example, the department is partnering with First Nations organisations to co-design key policy and operational matters in preparation for phased establishment of First Nations Assessment organisations from 1 July 2025.
- The Rules for the new Act will also respond to the special role Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) play by exempting them from certain provider governance board membership requirements. This ensures the aged care sector has more culturally safe providers and choice for older First Nations people.

The above changes to the legislative framework will continue to be supported by practical initiatives, including those outlined below, aimed at improving access to aged care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

- For example, the Government is investing \$77.6 million to support older First Nations people, their families, and carers to have better access to culturally safe care where it is needed. This includes funding to support First Nations services delivering residential care in remote areas to better align with the new residential funding model.
- Another initiative is the Elder Care Support Program – this was co-designed with First Nations organisations to ensure the program could best support older First Nations peoples to access aged care services.
- A First Nations Aged Care Workforce Action Plan is being co-designed with multiple First Nations peaks, representative groups, and providers. This plan will result in the recruitment and training of more First Nations people for clinical and non-clinical roles in aged care.
- We will also continue to work with ACCOs to build their capacity to provide aged care and develop cultural safety, trauma aware and healing-informed care training for aged care providers to improve access to culturally safe care.

The department also continues to take active steps and work with First Nations stakeholders, organisations like the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ageing and Aged Care Council and Elders to support and promote priority reforms outlined under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

This work complements the work of Ms Andrea Kelly, the interim First Nations Aged Care Commissioner who commenced in January 2024.

- The interim Commissioner has completed extensive national consultations about the role and design of a permanent Commissioner and the aged care priorities of older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Ms Kelly is using what she has heard to advocate to government and other aged care organisations for changes that will increase the cultural safety of aged care and help to close the gap in aged care.