

Opening Statement: Anne Burgess, Chair Council of Elders

The Council of Elders was established following a recommendation of the Aged Care Royal Commission in 2021. The intent was to raise the voices of older people in providing independent advice to Government on the reform of the aged care system.

We are 14 older people aged in our mid 70s to mid 90s from all around Australia. We are a very diverse, well networked group and many of us are in receipt of aged care services. We provide advice to the Minister for Aged Care and the Department and have done so throughout the development of the new Aged Care Act.

Our focus is particularly on the most disadvantaged whether that relates to cultural, health, remoteness or financial circumstances.

Overwhelmingly we support the need to improve aged care, with the Act being the critical foundation. We applaud the important cultural shift in establishing a rights based framework for the Act. We want to see a clear and rigorous regulatory approach to protecting participants rights that is applied to service providers and all decision makers in the aged care system. Ensuring older people have control to the extent possible of any decisions about their care through a supported decision making approach is another cultural shift that will require careful monitoring and further education.

Our advice has supported the need for an independent Complaints Commissioner, a single assessment process, the need for accessible palliative care and funded social support groups and the simplification of supporter roles in line with relevant State and Territory legislation.

Older people tell us every day about the extensive waiting times for assessment for aged care packages and then for the services to be available. They understand the need to ensure the system is financially viable and appropriately trained staff are attracted to work in aged care. Most older people have told us they accept the need for co-contributions where it can be afforded and where it is fair and equitable. They want to be satisfied that dollars raised go to improved care and services that are needed. We have provided advice on the need for a safety net and review processes for people on the margins. We are yet to see some of the detail on this.

We want all older people accessing aged care to be able to live active, self-determined and meaningful lives and be supported to do so. It should not have to be said that older people have a right to high quality care.

It's over 3 years since the Royal Commission. This is not a perfect Bill but it's far better than the current Act.

We need this Act passed into law by the end of this year and then let's get on with the implementation.

Thank you.