

Home & Community Care Not Transitioning to the Commonwealth

Funded 60% by the Commonwealth & 40% by WA State Government

The WA Health Department Aged and Continuing Care Directorate invited ACSWA to join various consumer peaks in a consultation on the WA Home & Community Care (HACC) Program. The aim of the consultation was to seek the peaks feedback in order to inform the Department of Health's position (advice to Government) with regard to the move of the WA HACC Program to the Commonwealth. ACSWA's advice to the Department was that on balance ACSWA supports the move of the WA HACC Program to the Commonwealth. Having aged care under one banner sits well with the Productivity Commission's 'Caring for Older Australians' report and would enable the current system to be streamlined and improved. It would be a more efficient funding model and an improvement from the consumer's point of view because they may be better able to get access to coordinated services.

The National Health Reform agreement announced in early August 2011 indicated that Western Australia and Victoria have not agreed to changes in responsibility for Home and Community Care (HACC). In these two States the services will continue to be delivered under HACC as a joint Commonwealth-State funded program.

Western Australian's HACC program not moving over to the Commonwealth contributes to confusion, as well as being an impediment to streamlined and seamless services for clients/carers due to the different models currently in operation in WA. The shift of transitioning HACC services in other states over to the Commonwealth has the potential in Western Australia to create a greater divide.

Demand for Packaged Care

100% Funded by the Commonwealth Government

There has also been a significant oversubscription in WA for in-home care packages, which enable people to remain living fairly independently at home. From an allocation of only 279 in-home care places available, Western Australia's applications for these places numbered 2263. These shortfalls are not sustainable. Western Australians have felt the brunt of the inadequacies of the current aged and community care system for many years, and we continue to be presented with figures reinforcing a very bleak picture of a system which we know is in crisis considering that the majority of the ageing community wish to remain living in their own home. Additional packages, particularly to enhance consumer directed care, needs to be made available for the sector to meet the increasing needs of the community and support carers in their endeavours.

Skilled Migration

In October 2011 it was officially gazetted that Perth was classified as a region for the purposes of migration into Australia. However on further investigation by ACSWA there is a significant flaw in the amendments that restricts the Aged Care Sector from accessing the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS) to recruit staff into the Aged Care sector.

The minimum skill level required for eligibility for RSMS is Skill Level 3 under the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupation (ANZSCO classification). The current ANZSCO classification for the most common group of Support Workers in the industry is 423111 – Aged and Disabled Carers Skill Level 4 which is below Level 3.

Consequently, the ANZSCO classification obviates the use of RSMS by the sector for its most needed category of migrant worker. The classification needs review especially in the light of occupations listed in the higher skill level 3 which include animal attendants, pet groomers and crutching contractors to name a few. To think that the care of our aged is rated at a skill level below that of attending to the grooming of animals is a disgrace and the ANZSCO classification must be questioned in this regard.

To ensure the aged care sector is able to effectively utilise the RSMS and take advantage of the welcome change in classifying Perth as a region, an exemption to the ANZSCO classification as it relates to Support Worker / paid carers is requested and/or ANZSCO be required to urgently review its current prohibitive and disparate carer classification.

Late Announcement of Home & Community Care Growth Funding

Applications for HACC growth funding close annually in August. Successful applications are generally announced the following January, after the Commonwealth has signed off the required documents.

If a provider is successful in obtaining growth funding there is a requirement that 50% of the approved growth funding be spent before the end of the financial year. Unspent funds may be clawed back from the WA Department of Health.

In 2011, notifications of successful funding were received in May 2011 which was totally unacceptable. No announcement has been made for 2012 for HACC growth funding or the annual Supplement payment for HACC Service Providers. The Supplement payment in particular is vital to Aged Care Providers in the Kimberley and South West rural areas, as they will not be eligible for growth funding until 2013 due to the commencement of the HACC Assessment Framework rolling out in July 2012.

Any delay in announcing HACC growth funding and annual Supplement payments can stifle service providers' ability to meet the needs of their client group, planning and implementation of capital works and vital infrastructure projects. Ultimately the Community Aged Care sector needs the announcements to occur no later than January each year, as any delay has implications for our State's capacity to deliver care for older Australians.

Communication & Consultation

There has been a general lack of information and sector consultation relating to the formulation of the Commonwealth's current initiative to develop a new front-end for the new National Aged Care system and the implications for Western Australia's service providers, clients, and carers. Western Australia's aged care sector has undergone significant reform processes with the implementation of the HACC Assessment Framework in February 2011, Community Common Care Standards and the Food Safety Programs for Food Services to vulnerable Persons, all within a relatively short period of time. Reform fatigue is a real possibility within the sector and can be compounded when communication and consultation is lacking.