

Equity and sustainability in aged care

Submission to ACCPA's *White Paper into the
Financial Sustainability of the Aged Care Sector*

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About UnitingCare Australia

UnitingCare Australia is the national body for the Uniting Church's community services network and is an agency of the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia.

We give voice to the Uniting Church's commitment to social justice through advocacy and by strengthening community service provisions.

We are the largest network of social service providers in Australia, supporting 1.4 million people very year across urban, rural, and remote communities.

We focus on articulating and meeting the needs of people at all stages of life and those that are most vulnerable.

Reforming the Aged Care System to Ensure Equity and Sustainability

UnitingCare Australia, one of the largest networks of social service providers in the country, acknowledges the need for urgent reform of our aged care system. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to ACCPA's *White Paper into the Financial Sustainability of the Aged Care Sector* which we understand will be provided to the newly formed Aged Care Taskforce.

We believe that all people, regardless of age, have the right to be treated with compassion and have access to the resources and supports they need, when they need them. It is our deep hope that Australia, as a society, will prioritise an equitable and sustainable future where everyone has the opportunity to age to their full potential.

Context and Challenge

With over 4.1 million Australians, or nearly 16% of the population currently over 65 - a figure projected to rise to 22% by 2057 and to one in four Australians by 2097 - the need for effective, quality aged care will continue to grow¹. The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety noted that an imminent reduction in the working-age population (falling to just 3.1 individuals for every Australian aged 65 or over by 2058) makes the call for a rethink of our aged care funding not just important, but essential².

Our Position

UnitingCare Australia believes that Australia's aged care system requires fundamental, structural reform to ensure its financial sustainability, while guaranteeing high-quality care, a skilled workforce, and an equitable distribution of services.

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/older-people/older-australians/contents/demographic-profile>

² Final report calls for fundamental and systemic aged care reform, March 2021, <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/news-and-media/final-report-calls-fundamental-and-systemic-aged-care-reform>

Principles

Our recommendations are guided by three principles:

1. *Everyone deserves care.* Regardless of personal financial means, every individual should have access to high-quality aged care.
2. *Those who can afford to pay more, should.* We believe in a fair and equitable system where costs are distributed according to one's ability to pay.
3. *An adequate safety net is needed.* The Government must ensure a system where those with limited means are not left behind.

Recommendations

We call on the Government to:

- Implement structural reforms that ensure a financially sustainable aged care system.
- Create a model where those who can afford to pay more for their aged care do so, while ensuring universal access to quality care for all people regardless of means.
- Establish a safety net that guarantees no individual is denied the quality care they need when they need it.

UnitingCare Australia, as a representative of a network that supports 1.4 million people across diverse Australian communities, stands ready to assist in this vital work. As advocates for social justice, we aim to inspire a world where dignity and compassion form the cornerstone of our care for the aged.

UnitingCare Australia looks forward to continuing to work collaboratively with all stakeholders on this urgent reform agenda.