



**AASW**

**Australian Association  
of Social Workers**

## *Response to the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee*

*Inquiry into Aged Care (Living Longer Living Better) Bill 2013, Australian Aged Care Quality Agency Bill 2013, Australian Aged Care Quality Agency (Transitional Provisions) Bill 2013, Aged Care (Bond Security) Amendment Bill 2013 and Aged Care (Bond Security) Levy Amendment Bill 2013*

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## Introduction

Thank you for inviting the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) to submit to the Senate Community Affairs Inquiry into Aged Care. It is understood that the focus of the Inquiry is the suite of five Bills associated with the Government's Living Longer Living Better aged care reform package. Given the nature of the reforms, it is important to provide certainty for older people and for aged care providers by specifying the legislative framework.

The overall intention of the reforms is clearly to provide accessible, high quality aged care for older people living at home or in residential care, while at the same time ensuring that the aged care system is financially viable. The Bills state the responsibilities the new entities that are being created, such as the National Contact Service (Gateway) and the Aged Care Quality Agency, as well as the new financial arrangements. Although the Bills appear sound, the ability to meet the aims of the reform will be also determined by the accompanying operational arrangements, that is, the regulations and guidelines. The AASW would like to draw the Standing Committee's attention to themes in the soon to be published AASW Ageing Position Paper that are relevant to Aged Care as well as comment on several potential implications of the Bills.

## Perception of Older People in Australia

At the broadest level, the Association holds the view that, as a life stage, older age should provide people with the opportunities to live healthy, positive and productive lives, connected to and participating in the life of the community. Achieving this is both a personal and community responsibility that can be facilitated by the government adopting a holistic approach to older people. Such an approach recognises that:

- Older Australians are not a cost burden, but are citizens who have the same human and citizenship rights as everyone else and as people who have much to contribute to community
- Older Australians may have health, support or care needs but they also have strengths and are self-determining.

These perspectives should inform the implementation of the reforms. The AASW supports many of the initiatives proposed in the Living Longer, Living Better 2012 report, however, notes that careful monitoring is required to ensure that the planned outcomes of the reform are achieved.

## Timetable for the Reforms

According to the government, it is intended that a number of the reforms will commence on 1 July 2013, for example the new arrangements for Home Care packages. The supporting guidelines are not yet completed, leaving limited time for them to be disseminated and understood by providers and consumers. It may be preferable to ensure that there is confidence in the thorough and accurate preparation of the relevant regulations and guidelines rather than meeting a proposed start date.

## Workforce

The AASW understands that at this stage, there has not been agreement by the parties involved in the Workforce Compact for it to proceed. This is disappointing as all aged care stakeholders know the importance of a skilled, properly remunerated workforce in supporting the reform process. Efforts

should be made to overcome the issues thwarting the progress of the Compact. The AASW would also add that there are people now reaching old age, who previously would not have done so in significant numbers. This includes people with serious mental illness, dual diagnosis and/or an intellectual disability. They will definitely need skilled staff to help them live successfully in the community or in residential care.

## **The National Contact Centre (Gateway) and Assessment**

While the following comments concern operational matters, they are nevertheless important. The National Contact Centre has the potential to streamline access to services for older people. Apparently older people with low to moderate needs will mostly receive a telephone assessment. The validity and reliability of these assessment tools must be above reproach, given that older people's welfare and ability to be independent are at stake. A related matter is the intention for service providers rather than for staff of the Aged Care Assessment Service to assess whether a person has dementia and is therefore eligible for a dementia supplement. It seems that the Psychogeriatric Assessment Scale (PAS) will be used and if so its inter-rater reliability must be high given that different aged care professionals may apply it. Similarly, if training is needed in the use of PAS, this should be provided.

## **Other issues related to the Bills**

The AASW requests the Standing Committee to be also mindful of the possibility that the

- increase in aged care reform investment may not be enough to respond to identified need
- increase in fees and bonds may result in financial disadvantage for some older people and their families
- National Contact Centre (Gateway) may be emphasising the development of a web-site and call centre at the expense of establishing an agency with enough resources to provide comprehensive information, needs assessment, care coordination and carer referral services on a regional basis
- elimination of low and high-care distinctions may not guarantee that people who need high care will receive priority
- elimination of low and high-care distinctions may introduce perverse incentives for providers to prioritise low care clients for whom the cost of services/care is lower.

The AASW therefore supports the careful monitoring of the reforms' implementation and holds the Government on its promise to review the reforms five years' post implementation.

Submitted for and on behalf of the Australian Association of Social Workers Ltd

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Chief Executive Officer