



MEDIA RELEASE

16 August 2024

“Stop dithering on older people’s rights”: Older Australians call on MPs to stop delaying action on aged care reform

Older people are urging a bipartisan approach from the Federal Government and Opposition to urgently introduce a new rights based Aged Care Act.

Organisations representing older Australians and their carers say the Aged Care Act needs to be introduced into Federal Parliament this sitting fortnight if laws are to be passed this year that address the neglect in aged care and stop putting the rights of older people at risk.

A number of organisations working with older Australians and their carers, including Australian Independent Retirees, Carers Australia, Council on the Ageing (COTA) Australia, Dementia Australia, Elder Abuse Action Australia, LGBTIQ+ Health Australia, National Seniors, Older Persons Advocacy Network, Partners in Culturally Appropriate Care Alliance and Returned Services League of Australia have previously written to both the Federal Government and the Opposition urging them to take action now to protect the rights of older Australians in aged care and introduce the Act so that proper parliamentary and public scrutiny.

COTA Australia CEO Patricia Sparrow said the promises both parties made Australians about bi-partisan action are welcome and important, but time is running out for the promises to be delivered.

“It’s been more than three years since the Royal Commission into Aged Care heard countless harrowing stories of abuse and neglect in aged care, yet older people are still waiting for a new rights based Aged Care Act to be introduced. Every story heard during the Royal Commission, and the stories from the decade before, differed slightly, but the fundamental thread was a lack of dignity, respect, and basic rights,”

“Both parties know that the reform we need requires the underpinning of a new Aged Care Act, yet for some reason we are still waiting for the Act to be introduced and debated. It is now time for the Government and the Opposition to legislate rights as the bedrock of an aged care system that values and respects older people,” Ms Sparrow said.

“Enshrining the basic rights of older people in a new Aged Care Act was a primary recommendation of the Aged Care Royal Commission. It is a fundamental step needed to address the many issues in aged care,” Chris Grice, CEO National Seniors Australia said.

“A new Aged Care Act is essential to provide the foundation for future reforms, such as the new Support at Home program slated to begin on 1 July 2025,” Mr Grice said.

CEO of Older Persons Advocacy Network Craig Gear said older people want to see a multi-partisan approach towards fairer aged care funding included in the Aged Care Act, however as a very minimum, we need to see a new rights based Aged Care Act which includes a commitment to Support at Home, introduced and passed this year.

“Older people have waited far too long for their rights to be enshrined in legislation. Without the Act passed we don’t have enhanced quality standards, we don’t have the promised increase in protections for older people, and honestly, we don’t have viable and sustainable aged care providers. There’s no doubt that when it comes to aged care in this country, business as usual is unacceptable,” Mr Gear said.

“This needs to be above politics. Older Australians, and their voting families will hold both parties responsible if we don’t see action to introduce the Aged Care Act and improve the system quickly,” Mr Gear said.

“We need a system that is fair, transparent, affordable and has the needs and rights of older Australians at the centre of it,” said Professor Tanya Buchanan, CEO of Dementia Australia.

“This reform is about changing the aged care culture to be focused on older people.

“Older people have been consulted, they’ve contributed, and they’ve waited long enough – now they need to see action.”

Media contact: Tamara Kotoyan, 0430 291 890 or Alana Mew, 0419 929 722