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**Submission to Senate Community
Affairs Committee inquiry into the
future of Australia's aged care sector
workforce**

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The future of the aged care sector workforce

Anglicare Australia is pleased to make this submission to the Senate Community Affairs Committee Inquiry into the future of Australia's aged care sector workforce.

Anglicare Australia and aged care

Anglicare Australia is a network of over 40 independent local, state, national and international organisations that are linked to the Anglican Church and are joined by values of service, innovation, leadership and the Christian faith that every individual has intrinsic value.

Our services are delivered to more than one in 30 Australians, in partnership with them, the communities in which they live, and other like-minded organisations. In all, over 12,000 staff and almost 7,800 volunteers work with over 930,000 vulnerable Australians every year delivering diverse services, in every region of Australia.

Many Anglicare member organisations provide residential and or community care for the aged.

They provide specialist support for the prematurely aged, homeless older people, isolated Aboriginal communities and other groups with special needs. Organisations with a particularly strong commitment and visibility in this sphere include St Bartholomew's House in Perth, Anglicare SA (especially through Ian George Court), the Brotherhood of St Laurence in Melbourne, and Anglicare NT through their work with remote Aboriginal communities.

Anglicare members also have a strong presence in the more mainstream areas of residential and home care: Anglicare Southern Queensland provides residential care for 643, home care for 3677 and home support for 19,900; Benetas in Melbourne provides residential care for 807 people and home care for 1712; Anglicare Sydney (450 and 2123) and Anglicare SA (590 and 1491). All Anglicare members have a commitment to caring for and providing real opportunities to the most disadvantaged, marginalised and vulnerable members of their communities.

Aged care network forum 9 March

Key personnel from Anglicare Australia network's aged care providers are holding a forum in Canberra on 9 March to discuss in some detail the ambitions they have for workforce development and the challenges they face in the changing sector landscape. It will provide specific insights into training needs, career opportunities, and associated human resource and financial management developments.

We plan to draw on this forum to produce a supplementary collaborative submission in

response to the Committee's terms of reference, which we would hope to forward to the Committee before Easter, if that were acceptable.

Beyond an industry approach

It is important to see work in the aged care sector as one facet of a more integrated role that Anglicare Australia's member organisations play in their communities: working in family support, financial counselling, community development, emergency relief, disability, mental health, youth support and protection, child and family services, alcohol and other drugs, homelessness services and housing.

Increasingly all these services rely on a workforce which is flexible, focussed on both individual and community outcomes, and embedded in a culture of quality improvement. The notion of working in partnership with the service users and their carers or family members is as pertinent in mental health or the *Communities for Children* space as it is in aged care.

Anglicare Australia has established an internal network to share knowledge on quality systems and governance, and most of its members are looking at systems and approaches that reach across their whole organisation, from executive management to their full range of services.

There are clearly key elements of aged care work which require understanding and competencies specific to the sector, with their own training and employment opportunities. There is also significant expertise and understanding that connect these different domains which need to be structured into workforce development.

It is a convenience of government, industry and the social services to separate people as aged or not aged, able or disabled, minority or mainstream, vulnerable or independent. Of course we are all of these things. And people do not lose their illness, disability or housing stress once they are over 70, on the one hand, or stop being musicians or gardeners or family leaders when they start to need help around the home, on the other. There are many volunteers who are well into their 90s who provide care and support to residents in care homes and many others whose struggles and distress are too often dismissed simply because they are old.

The underlying approach of all Anglicare members is to value each person fully, and to respect their circumstances, their capabilities and their connections to the communities they are part of. What we look for in our staff reflects that approach, and focussing too narrowly on the aged care workforce in an industry setting risks being quite counterproductive.

In contributing to the Productivity Commission's seminal inquiry into aged care, (*Caring for Older Australians*, 2011) Anglicare Australia talked in some detail about the development of a workforce that served the aged care and other community service sectors.

Responding to the Inquiry

Anglicare Australia has as its Mission “to engage with all Australians to create communities of resilience, hope and justice”. Our first strategic goal charges us to carry out that mission by “influencing social and economic policy across Australia [which is] ... informed by research and the practical experience of the Anglicare Australia network”.

In responding to this inquiry, Anglicare Australia is considering:

- a. the capacity of Anglicare aged and home care services to provide high quality, inclusive care and support across communities
- b. the development of an aged and community care workforce which has the skills and commitment to value, and respond to the needs and capabilities of the people it serves
- c. the wellbeing, development and respect for the people who make up the workforce itself in the present and into the future.

These points are mostly dealt with below under *Aged care reform* and *Wellbeing in the workforce*. Some of the complexity however lies in externalities: adequate community transport, digital inclusion, universal housing design, and ongoing employment opportunities are fundamental stepping stones to continuing participation for people as they age. Very few aged care services are in a position to deliver the high quality services in these fields. Similarly, a history of poverty, violence, ill health or discrimination cannot be resolved or overcome by aged care staff, no matter how well staffed or remunerated.

People working in aged care need to be able to link to other support and services if they are to work effectively in the contemporary environment. Similarly, the community needs to recognise that general community services and infrastructure are fundamental to the aged care sector doing its jobs well.

Aged care reform

The current reform of aged care in Australia is intended to ensure everyone can get the aged care and support they need, that they can choose where and how they do, and that they will make a contribution to its cost if they have the means. This is of course a very complex process. It requires:

- organisations and their staff to become much more flexible and responsive
- government to establish a new national assessment and information scheme that works for people no matter who or where they are
- the elderly and their families to become informed and active consumers.

These are all positive changes in Australia's overarching approach to aged care. It does depend however on increasingly sophisticated aged care delivery with appropriate staffing.

It also requires a comprehensive set of safeguards, support and evaluation systems in place to ensure the most marginalised and vulnerable members of our community enjoy the benefits of this new scheme, and are not further disadvantaged by its strong market features.

Staff members in these circumstances need to develop sophisticated and respectful relationships with the people for whom they are caring, and for that relationship to underpin the many decisions they make and support. They also need to be able to account for the time they spend with individuals, both in terms of costing and in outcomes. In this new setting these are, generally speaking, more complex jobs.

Many of these complexities are not in themselves aged care specific. The challenge is to support relevant training and career opportunities for staff members within and beyond the aged care sector. Many Anglicare member organisations provide a community-wide suite of support and services to people across the life path. They would be well placed to develop career pathways across the social service sectors, particularly where training and development resources are available.

Anglicare Australia points to the tension between consumer directed service provision with a strong user pays – marketised – component (as is developing in the new aged care system) and the growing divide between the financially secure and the insecure in our society.

As charities with a fundamental commitment to supporting people on the margins of our society, Anglicare member organisations may be commercially disadvantaged as these new social service markets evolve, and the particular skills of a workforce responsive to a diverse array of people become less of a mainstream concern.

On the other hand, as Dr Katrina Radford (Belardi 2016) found, the strong value base of organisations such as these, where they are supported by quality systems, are a key factor in attracting and retaining good staff.

The impact of individualised funding in this context has not been entirely thought through. For example, reflective practice is a fundamental pillar underpinning a culture of quality within a service, and that process bears fruit when supervised or supported by more senior staff. However, when staff time is linked to personal funding packages, many consumers or family members are reluctant to pay for the time such reflection takes. Value for money is a very different proposition when looked at in the short term and the long term, or from an individual, business or a social perspective.

Wellbeing in the workforce

Anglicare Australia is taking this opportunity to put the issues around aged care sector workforce into a wider setting. The underlying issue is the profile and status of community services generally, and aged care work in particular.

Much of current political debate and decision making rests on the premise that government expenditure is high and that lower taxes will lead to a healthier, wealthier and more vibrant society. Aged care and services delivered by the community sector are largely funded or underwritten by government and so, in the context above, there is an opprobrium attached to them. It is certainly always important for service providers *not* to be seen to waste public money. As predominantly female occupations that are more about quality of life than material development, the caring professions in any event have never paid well.

The issues of economic security, equity and equality, are very real for many members of the aged care sector workforce. A number of recent Senate Committee inquiries have tackled these issues in some depth. Anglicare Australia has made recent contributions to the Senate Economics References Committee Inquiry into Economic Security for Women in (2105) and the Senate Community Affairs References Committee inquiry into the extent of income inequality in Australia (2014), as well as a specific submission on retirement income to the Tax White Paper Taskforce (2105).

They all point to the financial vulnerability and insecurity of people with a history low paid work, of part time or casual work, broken by family and caring responsibilities. For a whole number of reasons, there are many people in the aged care workforce who find themselves in this situation when they reach old age.

It is not good enough to presume the more competitive marketplace that will come along with a user pays age care industry and an ageing demographic will result in better working conditions for people in the workforce and a more secure wellbeing for them in retirement. It would be even worse to ignore the issue of working conditions altogether.

Government and industry bodies need to look at:

- ensuring income support, superannuation and taxation rules better support people at the lower income levels
- the specific circumstances of people (mainly women) who have had family caring responsibilities
- the whole notion of public investment in creating a caring and inclusive society, and better championing in the public sphere.

In taking this discussion into account, Anglicare Australia cannot see how it could be possible to grow the highly committed and skilled workforce needed without considerable public investment.

Conclusion

Anglicare Australia hopes to provide the Committee with some detailed responses from its members to this Inquiry's terms of reference. They may well include specific proposals on workforce development, and ongoing sector and system reform.

There are a small number of broad recommendations drawn from the discussion above that we can make at this stage.

1. Develop workforce qualifications across the community sector to assist in transitioning from a transactional to relational approach, particularly in regard to:
 - a. consumer directed and person centred care
 - b. co-design of community participation programs.
2. Establish a monitoring and evaluation framework for the new aged care system that can ensure equity of access and outcomes for special needs groups, including the most vulnerable and disadvantaged population groups.
3. Ensure public investment and support for workforce development; particularly for small, isolated and specialist services.
4. Amend taxation and superannuation rules in order to strengthen the financial security of aged (and other) care workers in retirement.
5. Use language in public discourse that highly values our social services, better celebrates the aged among us, and moves away from catastrophizing Australia's changing demography.

END

References

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