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by Mark Sheldon-Stemm February 12, 2021

CONTRIBUTORS

Will more money fix aged care?





Additional money will help bring improvements but more elements are needed to achieve a five-star aged care system, writes Mark Sheldon-Stemm.

Recommendations to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety proposed that more money needs to be provided for aged care to become a five-star service. The amount needed is estimated at \$15 to \$30 billion as either one-off or recurrent funding.

However, will this address the major issues that have been found by the royal commission?

From reading the submissions, testimonies and in particular those referenced in the proposed recommendations, there are three main themes that stand out:

- abuse
- neglect
- waiting for services.

Will money fix these things?

Abuse

The abuse reported and demonstrated is a product of culture rather than money. Those involved have been shown to have poor leadership from the board and senior and middle management, which is then reflected in staff's treatment of the elderly.

This is an attitude and no amount of money will change this or those involved. The proposed recommendations have addressed this through tighter regulations and the ability for the aggrieved to take civil action against those they see responsible.

Neglect

This also follows on from the above and is the silent form of abuse. Many have pointed to the fact that neglect has been driven by the lack of staff available to attend the needs of the elderly and therefore more money is needed. The proposed recommendations look at addressing this through minimum staffing levels in residential care. This requires more money and is estimated to cost from \$ 750 million to \$1 billion a year of recurrent funding.

Will this avoid any neglect from occurring? Probably not.

Neglect is a mixture of attitude and resources. More resources are required but it is quality rather than quantity that is needed. Getting the mix right is the key to success.



Mark Sheldon-Stemm

Waiting for services

The rationing of aged care services has been highlighted during the inquiry and it is also reflected in the proposed recommendation that services are no longer rationed. The estimated cost of this would be approximately \$2.5 billion a year in recurrent funding and it would eliminate the waiting list for home care.

In residential care, there are already approximately 20 per cent of the allocated beds still not built and occupancy levels are dropping year on year in response to the push to keep people at home and provide services there.

Attitude, leadership, dedication

There is more money required to achieve a five-star aged care system, which includes unrationed services, an increase in some staffing levels and addressing the indexation issues that have produced a 70-per-cent efficiency in aged care over the past 23 years.

But like the expensive restaurants and resorts, money does not always drive service. Only service that provides customer satisfaction. And hopefully it will eliminate abuse and neglect that occurs in aged care.

More money will provide a base for improvements but in the end, it is the attitude, leadership, and dedication in providing services that will deliver a five-star system. Having this new attitude to providing aged care services is the challenge for providers and our society in general.

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