



Catholic  
Health  
Australia

# AGED CARE POLICY OPERATIONAL PLAN

2023-2025

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands on which we meet today. We acknowledge that they have occupied and cared for these lands over countless generations, and we celebrate their continuing contributions to the region in which we meet. We acknowledge their elders past, present and emerging.

Astrolabe Group was commissioned to support Catholic Health Australia and its members develop an Aged Care Operational Plan. This involved Astrolabe undertaking extensive engagement and consultation independently and concurrently with CHA. In preparing the report, Astrolabe has made every effort to ensure the information included is reliable and accurate. Astrolabe is unable to accept responsibility or liability for the use of this report by third parties.

Catholic Health Australia  
ABN 30 351 500 103

Further detail on Catholic Health Australia can be obtained at [www.cha.org.au](http://www.cha.org.au)

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Catholic Health Australia is a membership-based organisation, representing Australia's largest non-government grouping of hospitals, aged and community care services. Members employ more than 83,000 staff and collectively manage 12,000 hospital beds and 7,000 independent living units.

Members operating facilities within the Aged Care sector account for over 12% of not-for profit aged care facilities in Australia.

This Aged Care Policy Operational Plan is the result of detailed and deliberative consultation with a range of representatives across the membership with content validated through a facilitated workshop of CEOs and leaders representing members across Australia.

It was evident that stakeholders have high regard for the collaborative approach and constructive advocacy approach taken by CHA, appreciating that CHA is known to get access to key policy and decision-makers to present evidence-based, realistic solutions to identified problems.

This Plan outlines several focus areas and associated actions for CHA's aged care advocacy agenda over the period 2023-2025.

Most stakeholders acknowledged and valued the overarching role CHA plays in presenting solutions-focused views or critical analysis of government policies without fear of recriminations to individual operators. In general, members are looking for CHA to operate as a trusted partner and advocate, a go-between of government and policy makers making changes/decisions to the realities being experienced by those on the ground.

The role of CHA and how it conducts itself is discussed under Role of CHA. This is particularly important as we think about our strengths and how we would work within a sector.

This Plan also outlines priorities to support member-identified objectives and a stronger, more human-centred, aged care sector under the following four focus areas:

- 1. Advocacy & Policy**
- 2. Workforce**
- 3. Financial Sustainability**
- 4. Collaboration**

Given the continued ageing population and the predicted doubling of people aged 85+ in the next 10 years, there is a strong rationale for government to walk hand-in-hand with the aged care sector – acknowledging aged care is essential for the lifestyle and quality of life for people in later years, many of whom will need support or assistance with some tasks but still want to enjoy an active and fulfilling life. This provides an open ear and regular forums for CHA to influence policy and government decision making and a forum for representing the needs of residents and operators.

The long-held tradition of caring for the vulnerable and providing service to those who need it, particularly the aged, sets CHA members apart from the for-profit sector and should continue to be a core part of CHA's narrative.

# THE ROLE OF CHA



CHA has an important role to play in collating and representing the collective interests of its membership and presenting an evidence-based position, supported by data and member insights. CHA has a role to play as an organiser and provocateur in pushing for changes to policy, legislation, and community perception of the aged care sector. CHA will collaborate with providers and their representatives to present a unified position on key reforms where appropriate.

Members are looking to CHA to be a trusted partner and advocate, operating as a go-between for government and the policy makers and making decisions that will affect operators, staff and those living in aged care. CHA can present the collective views of its membership and a united voice, with greater weight and influence than individual operators.

The long-held tradition of caring for the vulnerable and providing service to those who need it, particularly the aged, sets CHA members apart from many in the sector and this should be part of its defining narrative.

*The following principles will guide CHA's Aged Care agenda and operations as a representative group and align to holistic objectives shared by CHA:*

## Leading Peak Body

CHA will strive to become a leading peak body stimulating thinking, promoting discussion, and influencing progress on creating a more viable and robust aged care system for the future.

CHA will be a credible advocate and leader who are identified by key decision-makers and who can get the sector speaking to relevant Government Ministers and involved in important discussions, be at the table, with one voice, with influence, achieving real and meaningful outcomes.

## Consult with members on emerging policy

CHA will develop and influence and relate policy decisions to the key services required. CHA will do this by consulting with members, leveraging their skills and experience, on an ongoing basis.

## Being a prophetic voice with focus on mission and value to the sector

CHA to be a prophetic voice encouraging members to ensure the sector is providing solutions to key issues and making a difference in people's lives, underpinned by the fundamental desire amongst members to do good in the community.

Promote member's focus on mission and use it as a point of difference, highlighting the excellent care provision by members and their significant value-add to the sector, and ensuring that this is recognised by government and the community.

## Greater legitimacy for the aged care sector

CHA will continue to guide members to enhance collaboration and legitimacy for aged care through the pursuit of partnership opportunities and identifying opportunities for a shared positive narrative.

## Two-way communication

Provide two-way communication between government and members, particularly through active and timely advocacy on issues, addressing challenges, providing potential solutions to shared challenges identified in consultation with members and providing expert policy analysis to members on emerging issues.



## KEY FOCUS AREA: Advocacy and Policy



Members are looking for their on-the-ground experiences and issues related to legislative and policy change to be conveyed to decision makers. Emphasising the sheer numbers of the community of interest (who are also voters) creates a strong platform for CHA to exert influence. CHA will lead the conversation on behalf of members, ensuring access to decision makers on key topics and issues.

Given the scale of legislative and policy change that has occurred and continues to occur in the sector, members are looking for timely and proactive advocacy and representation on critical issues as a collective group. Several priorities for policy change and advocacy that were raised consistently by stakeholders over the coming two years include:

### 1.1 Improved partnership with ACQSC

CHA to advocate for the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission to positively change its approach to, and mindset about, the sector, encouraging a shift in the Commission's focus from monitoring compliance to providing assistance and guidance to lift the sector up through awareness, education, and a focus on the

positives within the sector. The Commission needs to walk hand-in-hand with the aged care sector to support success and not focus on failure.



**Currently the ACQSC behaves like a watchdog towards aged care providers rather than helping them achieve the standards that have been set."**

— member feedback

### 1.2 Emerging and improved models of care

CHA to advocate for policy co-design by the government with sector stakeholders in order to broaden the view of care, moving beyond the clinical standards and embracing person-centred and responsive care in the home or a home environment.

This includes reviewing the care minute classification to better embrace allied health and reablement, and improve mental health through social activities and pastoral care.

The current narrow approach to care should also be modified to recognise the scope of practice of enrolled nurses and not insist that quality nursing care can only be delivered by Registered Nurses in care minutes.

The value of emerging technology should be tested and embraced. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic we saw the benefits of medical appointments being undertaken via telehealth or using video calling technology. Telehealth can provide timely support, particularly in rural and regional areas as well as access to expert advice without travel for patients and staff. An emphasis on virtual healthcare and the incorporation of smart buildings and better access to technology can increase the capability and reduce stress for all staff.



**The Federal Government is out of touch.”**

— member feedback

### 1.3 Ethos and Mission

CHA to ensure that the Catholic ethos and mission is highlighted when writing policies or papers as it creates a point of differentiation that connects to a rich history of care and contribution.

CHA, with its members, to seek out and contribute to knowledge on social and spiritual values to which the wider community can relate (in addition to religious values) when it comes to aged care service provision, making the case for spiritual and pastoral care to be acknowledged as a desirable and valuable service to residents and patients.

### 1.4 Thought Leadership

CHA to give more prominence to the value of thought leadership and regularly ascertain case studies of lived experience and lessons learnt from across the Catholic aged care sector to inform advocacy and policy. Thought leadership is critical and should be a core function of CHA, with a need to authentically share its knowledge so that it can bring people together to stimulate new ideas and reflect the current ideas and concepts in the sector.



## KEY FOCUS AREA: Workforce

The aged care sector has struggled with a workforce shortage for the past few years which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. There have been many factors that have contributed to the struggles of the sector, which include a lack of qualified staff, a non-competitive wage, negative perceptions of the sector, and disruption caused by changing regulations and policies.



Through the stakeholder interviews and online workshop, it was clear that a key priority for the majority of members was the need for a sector-specific workforce strategy. CHA has a role to play in working with members to explore new models and government support across the sector, including nursing, caring, lifestyle and essential support staff as well as training and accreditation for new and existing staff.



**Having children from the local school visit residents is great for the residents while it also shows a potential career in caring.”**

— member feedback

### 2.1 National Workforce Strategy

CHA to advocate for a National Workforce Strategy to be developed by the Commonwealth addressing the significant shortfalls in relation to all staff across the sector, including enrolled and registered nurses, caring, lifestyle and essential

support staff, both in capacity and capability across the sector.

### 2.2 Wage Equity

In addition to the Fair Work Commission's decision to award aged care workers a 15 per cent pay rise, CHA to continue to advocate for support workers (including administration, kitchen, laundry and maintenance staff) to also receive a pay boost to stop them leaving the sector. This includes support for the next phase of the Work Value Case – bringing the pay increase to 25% for all aged care staff.

Better wages and conditions are key to attracting and retaining workers, and to restoring dignity to the carers who do such important work for society. Advocacy for wages growth to highlight the need for fair and equitable compensation in comparison to similar work in other sectors, such as healthcare.

### 2.3 Innovative Ideas

CHA to lead the development of a policy ideas in partnership with members on innovative initiatives to implement to attract, engage and retain staff in order to provide services to the highest quality possible.

CHA to promote and share different workforce models across the Catholic aged care sector, bringing together the innovative thinking happening across the membership and involving external stakeholders as necessary to promote larger scale progress. Consideration should be given to promoting models across the whole sector where appropriate.

### 2.4 Education, Training, Talent

CHA to support opportunities for trialling and sharing the creation of talent pools and the possibility of developing an alignment with training and education facilities, including vertical integration with Catholic education providers. Upskilling and accelerated qualifications for staff to also be considered.

## KEY FOCUS AREA: Financial Sustainability



The aged care sector is currently facing significant challenges surrounding financial sustainability. There are a number of causes including some that are related to legislation and compliance as well as increases in cost-of-living expenses such as utilities. The Catholic aged care sector is influenced by theological mission which requires consideration for those who don't have the means to pay for services upfront or at all. Catholic aged care has been prominent in Australia for a very long time, however many providers who have access to land and facilities do not have the funds to maintain or properly operate their facilities further jeopardising long-term viability.

CHA to play a role through advocating for the financial needs of the sector by lobbying government for comprehensive and meaningful structural reform that considers the different needs of users/residents.

A few of the examples provided by stakeholders include:

- There is an opportunity for the aged care sector to be sustainably funded by increasing the Medicare levy.
- There could be investigations into smarter fee systems which the sector has used for other forms of funding but not in the health and aged care sector. This could be something akin to HECS for student university fees.



**The majority of people will eventually need and enter aged care at some point, so why not fund it in a manner similar to health care."**

— member feedback

### 3.1 Structural Reform

CHA to advocate for meaningful and urgent structural reform by the Commonwealth government, including the issue of fair and equitable funding of aged care and innovative aged care models.

### 3.2 Integrated Care

CHA to be a part of the discussion concerning more patient-centric care, wellness and prevention, integrated care, funding and management, and optimised care pathways, building on and extending the concept of integrated care and information-enabled aged care and health networks.

### 3.3 Efficient Pricing

CHA to advocate for funding for new and improved models of care and efficient pricing, including virtual care and home care, shared models utilising collective thinking from the sector, which must be holistic and strategic in nature, not piecemeal.

CHA to promote access to services for all, regardless of an individual's capacity to pay. Pricing needs to ensure quality care is available to all in line with the Catholic faith and not limited to those with financial means.

### 3.4 Equitable Outcomes

CHA to advocate for more equitable aged care outcomes. This includes removing cost barriers so people can get care when they need it in a manner that works for them and ensuring that high-value services are equitably available in all communities to all people in need.

### 3.5 Spiritual and Lifestyle Needs

CHA to advocate for funding that covers not just the physical necessities of aged care but also the spiritual and lifestyle needs that are needed to support a balanced and fulfilling life into old age as sought by patients and residents who choose a CHA member-operated facility.



## KEY FOCUS AREA: COLLABORATION



Sharing resources, challenges and solutions can create greater efficiency amongst members and identify shared problems and interests for advocacy under the banner of CHA.

Opportunities exist for CHA to support members as a collective in a range of areas including but not limited to joint procurement, resource development, recruitment and training.

CHA to facilitate and enhance collaboration across the Catholic aged care sector through meaningful and purposeful forums. There is a real and urgent need to minimise, if not eradicate, competing interests, which stymie genuine collaboration and the potential for key partnerships.

### 4.1 Regular Forums

CHA to facilitate regular forums for senior sector personnel, such as Directors or Executive Managers, across specialist disciplines including Human Resources, Finance or Information Technology that include a clear remit and set outcomes to enable knowledge sharing, evidence gathering and problem identification in a meaningful and productive way.

### 4.2 Technology and Innovation

CHA to guide members to embrace the need for technology and innovation in aged care to deliver better quality, efficiencies or lower costs and support service provision, particularly in regional or remote areas. CHA to support shared implementation or testing, as well as knowledge sharing, in an aged care setting.

### 4.3 Internal Systems

CHA to encourage collaboration across the sector in relation to existing internal systems, such as Payroll and Information Technology, as well as leveraging group purchasing and exploring innovations to increase revenue from non-government sources.

### 4.4 Joint Procurement

CHA to work with members to explore opportunities for joint procurement and bring options to the table for members to consider and encourage joint procurement initiatives for, or across, the sector.



Catholic  
Health  
Australia

## CONTACTS

Catholic Health Australia

PO Box 245

Civic Square

ACT 2608

T +61 2 6203 2777

[cha.org.au](http://cha.org.au)

 [catholichealthaustralia](https://www.facebook.com/catholichealthaustralia)

 [@chaaustralia](https://twitter.com/chaaustralia)

ABN 30 351 500 103