

# Media Release

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## **Aged care staffing debate better focused on the quality of outcomes**

Leading Age Services Australia (LASA) CEO Sean Rooney says debate around staffing in aged care facilities would be better served by focusing on the quality of outcomes for older Australians rather than mandated staffing ratios.

Mr Rooney said it was not negotiable that older Australians and their families should be assured that the quality of care and services they are receiving meet stringent national standards of quality and safety.

“However, notwithstanding recent public commentary in aged care regarding staff-to-resident ratios, quality of care is not as simple as the number of staff on duty or arbitrary staffing ratios,” Mr Rooney said.

“The basis for deciding on staffing levels and their skills mix needs to be driven by the actual care needs of individual residents.

“Flexibility to adjust the staffing mix as the profile of residents change is a very important consideration and I believe we risk losing sight of this in the current debate.”

Mr Rooney pointed to the Australian Government’s 2011 Productivity Commission Report, *Caring for Older Australians*, which found that while there are superficial attractions to mandatory staffing ratios, there are also downsides.

The report notes that “an across-the-board staffing ratio is a fairly ‘blunt’ instrument for ensuring quality care because of the heterogeneous and ever-changing care needs of aged care recipients - in the Commission’s view it is unlikely to be an efficient way to improve the quality of care.”

“Imposing mandated staffing ratios could also eliminate incentives for providers to invest in innovative models of care, or adopt new technologies that could assist care recipients,” the report says.

Mr Rooney said LASA had noted the announcement last week that a re-elected Queensland Labor State Government will commit to introducing public reporting on ‘safe staff to patient ratios’ in aged care settings and lobby the Federal Government to mandate nurse-to-resident ratios in private aged care facilities.

“LASA has written to the Queensland Premier to query this approach and propose a more informed and appropriate way forward.”

Mr Rooney also noted that there are other trends influencing the future of work in aged care.

“The workforce of tomorrow will be dramatically different from the workforce of today and yesterday,” Mr Rooney said.

“New models of care and the use of new technologies will result in us working very differently in the future as compared to the past. This too will impact on the number, mix and competencies of the age services workforce of the future.”

LASA acknowledges the Federal Government’s recently announced Aged Care Workforce Taskforce, responsible for developing a wide-ranging workforce strategy focused on supporting safe, quality aged care for senior Australians.

LASA looks forward to working with our Members as we contribute to the development of an industry strategy that ensures accessible, affordable, quality care and services for older Australians, delivered by high performing, respected and sustainable providers of age services.

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