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Health and aged care systems need to work together in the interests of older Australians

Australia's voice of aged care, Leading Age Services Australia (LASA), today called for all participants in Australia's aged care and health systems to work collaboratively and constructively in the interests of older Australians.

LASA CEO Sean Rooney said caring for the growing numbers of older Australians is an issue of national importance.

"The changing needs and expectations of older Australians and their families, combined with an aged care system experiencing significant change, cannot be ignored," Mr Rooney said.

"The pathway to address these issues, and to ensure our aged care system provides accessible, affordable, quality care and services for older Australians, is by working together."

Mr Rooney said the recent Aged Care Survey findings by the Australian Medical Association (AMA) highlighting that one in three doctors intend not to visit patients in aged care are a cause for concern.

"A priority for older Australians living in the community or an aged care home is having access to quality and responsive GP care, as many have complex and chronic conditions."

Mr Rooney said it is vital that system settings are appropriate to ensure GP care is available for older Australians whether in their homes or in residential aged care facilities (RACFs).

"In March this year LASA wrote to the Federal Government raising concerns regarding the Practice Incentives Program (PIP), General Practitioner Aged Care Access Incentive (ACAI) component, which aims to encourage GPs to provide increased and continuing services in RACFs," Mr Rooney said.

"Recognising that older Australians are entering residential aged care with increasingly complex care needs, this program needs to be designed so that demand for GPs is met, quality care is provided, and unnecessary hospitalisations are avoided."

Mr Rooney said the provision of appropriate levels of care for older Australians in residential care facilities is not as simple as the number of staff on duty, or arbitrary staffing ratios.

"Providers design their staffing models to deliver on the most stringent national standards set by the Federal Government and enforced by the Australian Aged Care Quality Agency," 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."

Mr Rooney said LASA has been advising the Federal Government for the past year of the impact on residential care providers of the combination of rising operating costs and stagnant revenues from government.

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“It is not unreasonable to expect that Australia’s aged care system is adequately funded to be sustainable and to meet the needs of older Australians,” Mr Rooney said.

“Regrettably this is not the case. Independent reviews and industry experts have identified funding as the major issue for the industry, but there is no clear plan to resolve the fact that the level of funding provided to providers is not adequate to meet the changing and growing needs and expectations of older Australians.

“Australia is facing a ‘new normal’ of older people in our society as the ‘baby boomer’ generation ages, requiring a major shift in the way we think about the aged care workforce and a holistic response. The Productivity Commission estimates by 2050 the aged care workforce will need to have grown to almost 1 million, an increase of 168 per cent.

“This presents the industry and the nation with a massive challenge that must be addressed holistically and collaboratively.”

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