



# The Coalition's Policy for Healthy Life, Better Ageing

September 2013

## Key Points

The Coalition recognises that older Australians want better choices and improved access to the type of services which will enable them to continue to live active and healthy lives.

The Coalition believes better ageing is about ensuring older Australians have the care they need, when they need it and wherever they need it.

Equally, those providing care should have support and flexibility to remain sustainable and free to do what they do best – delivering high quality, dignified care to older Australians.

We believe the system can do better.

The Productivity Commission's Caring for Older Australians report should continue to inform future policy direction to support a more flexible and sustainable system that is focused on the provision of high quality care. If elected, the Coalition will prioritise future reform with the sector by negotiating a *Healthy Life, Better Ageing Agreement*.

Our five year *Healthy Life, Better Ageing Agreement* will consider major elements of reform for the care of older Australians. It will be the first time that the sector has been assured of both flexibility and certainty. The Coalition will work to streamline administrative processes and 'cut red tape' so that dedicated staff can spend more time providing care rather than filling out paperwork.

The Coalition supports real reform, including:

- ensuring older Australians have the care they need, when they need it and wherever they need it;
- further expansion and more flexible arrangements for living in the community;
- a simplified information system to assist people to access services;
- independent accreditation, complaints and quality care assessment processes; and
- tough and workable standards for the sector so there is confidence in the consistency of care that is provided.

As a first priority, the Coalition will take the necessary steps to put back into the general pool of aged care funding the \$1.2 billion allocated to the Workforce Compact and work with providers to ensure that these funds are distributed in a way that is more flexible and better targeted, without jeopardising the viability of aged care facilities.

Dementia is one of the leading reasons older Australians seek residential care.

The Coalition will provide \$200 million over five years to Australian scientists and researchers working on how to prevent or cure dementia.



# Introduction

Older Australians deserve access to quality ageing services according to their needs, noting that ageing covers the broad spectrum from wellbeing to palliative care and many things in between.

The system must be easier to navigate with streamlined access to services that people require.

There must be appropriate safety nets in place so care is provided according to need, not capacity to pay.

All governments must continue to strive for a system that treats all Australians with the dignity and respect they deserve in their senior years.

Family members should have confidence that the system will deliver the services required for their loved one, when and where it is needed.

In recent years it has become increasingly apparent that the system is in need of reform. Many Australians have experienced the anguish of trying to understand a complex system that has been under strain.

While most Australians receive high quality care, there have been instances where some vulnerable members of our community have been badly let down.

We must continue to do better.



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# The Plan

## 1. A Five Year *Healthy Life, Better Ageing Agreement*

The Coalition understands the widespread support for reform and better services.

There were 500 submissions to the Productivity Commission inquiry into aged care. The subsequent *Caring for Older Australians* report received considerable support from a wide section of stakeholders as an effective roadmap for reform.

The Coalition does not intend to impose reform from above. Instead, we will work in partnership with stakeholders to negotiate a more defined agreement informed by the *Caring for Older Australians* report.

The Productivity Commission's *Caring for Older Australians* report should continue to guide future policy to support a flexible and sustainable system that is focused on the provision of high quality care.

The Coalition will prioritise future reform with the sector through genuine negotiation of a *Healthy Life, Better Ageing Agreement*.

The Coalition's five year *Healthy Life, Better Ageing Agreement* will be the first time that the sector will be assured of both flexibility and certainty.

The *Healthy Life, Better Ageing Agreement* will define reform implementation priorities over a five-year period and afford the sector the much needed security and confidence that has been lacking under Labor.

It is important that any reform ensures older Australians and their families have the services that they need, when they need them and wherever they need them.

We support a much more simplified information system to assist older Australians and their families to access the information they need. It is important that they are provided with assistance to find their way through the system and connect with services they require.

The Coalition supports clear standards across the sector so there can be confidence in the consistency of care. This will be achieved through independent accreditation, complaints and quality care assessment processes. This will afford greater transparency and provide more confidence in a sector that in the vast majority of cases already provides high quality services to older, vulnerable Australians.

Older Australians want to continue to live at home and should be assisted to do so with further expansion and more flexible arrangements for living in the community.



The Coalition will work in partnership with a wide spectrum of stakeholders to ensure that the *Healthy Life, Better Ageing Agreement* enables older Australians access to quality care in accordance with their needs.

## 2. Cut red tape

The Coalition will work with stakeholders to cut red tape as part of the Coalition's five year *Healthy Life, Better Ageing Agreement*.

This will be an important part of our commitment to reduce red tape compliance costs by \$1 billion a year.

We will start by streamlining the administrative burden that some service providers face but will at all times ensure standards and quality care is maintained.

The complex regulations that plague the sector are not only costly and onerous but inhibit providers from delivering even higher levels of quality care. It has been reported that nursing staff spend at least a third of their time simply doing paperwork. Reducing compliance burdens will also drive greater efficiencies which will allow better flexibility to enhance quality of care provided.

Through our *Healthy Life, Better Ageing Agreement*, the Coalition will also:

- **Reward aged care providers to do the right thing**  
Accreditation is at record levels, as at 30 June 2012 almost 95 per cent of providers had been awarded three years accreditation. The Coalition will examine ways to reward providers who have attained and maintained three year accreditation over successive periods. This may include an extension to subsequent accreditation periods;
- **reduce the complexity for providers seeking aged care places**  
The Coalition will work to reduce the number of steps and forms required by providers keen to deliver care. For example, a residential provider wanting to combine two facilities that are next door to each other has to fill out a 15 page form and may have to complete additional forms of 10 and 11 pages. To exchange care places the form is 17 pages. A provider who transfers approved places to another approved provider fills out another 39 page form;
- **reduce the requirement to provide the same information in multiple forms**  
The Coalition will ensure that the provision of information is simplified and able to be provided electronically wherever possible, so that providers are not constantly required to supply the same information to the Commonwealth for multiple purposes.



For example, there are many forms which require the same provider information covering five to six pages. Once the Department has this information, they shouldn't need to collect it multiple times.

Every time there is an addition in key personnel, the provider has to complete an 11 page form and a four page form when they cease to be key personnel. If the key personnel move from one key personnel position to another with the same approved provider, a separate four page 'Change' form is required.

### 3. Investing in the aged care workforce

Labor's Workforce Compact appears to be more about boosting union membership than improving aged care and adds to the regulatory quagmire without guaranteeing improved conditions for all workers.

The Coalition believes that Labor's Workforce Compact is discriminatory as it does not apply to all workers. Under Labor, providers with 50 or more beds will need to enter into an Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA) and comply with the conditions of the Workforce Supplement to access funding. Providers with less than 50 beds need not enter into an EBA, but must however comply with the conditions of the Workforce Supplement to access funding.

This aspect of the legislation was the key issue of contention at the recent Senate inquiry into the Living Longer, Living Better package of Bills. The evidence was clear that many providers could not justify accessing the supplement as it fell far short of the actual cost of the proposed wage increases with providers having to meet on-costs.

Had Labor been serious about improving conditions in the sector, they could have worked through existing frameworks such as the Conditional Adjustment Payments (CAP) mechanisms or through a formal application process to the Fair Work Commission.

The Coalition understands that increased pay and improved conditions are essential to attract and retain skilled workers to the sector, but they must be affordable and sustainable.

As a first priority, if elected the Coalition will take the necessary steps to put back into the general pool of aged care funding the \$1.2 billion allocated to the Workforce Compact. We will work with providers to ensure available funding from the \$1.2 billion is distributed in a way that is more flexible and better targeted, without jeopardising the viability of aged care facilities.



## 4. Investing in Dementia Research

Dementia is one of the leading reasons older Australians enter residential aged care.

Dementia is now the third leading cause of death in Australia and no cure exists. Already over 320,000 Australians live with the disease, including one in four people aged over 85. A large boost to funding dementia research is vital because without a medical breakthrough nearly one million Australians will have dementia by 2050.

In recognising the seriousness of this insidious disease, the Coalition will provide a further \$200 million over five years to Australian scientists and researchers working on ways to prevent or cure dementia.

Our commitment will support our dedicated medical researchers in their search for treatment and cure, and give hope and comfort to the 1.2 million Australians currently caring for someone with this illness.

After heart disease, cancer and mental health, dementia is now one of our greatest disease burdens.

This commitment further builds on the Coalition's strong record of providing a five-fold increase in health and medical research in government. Research funding for dementia and Alzheimer's Disease increased by over 380 per cent between 2000 and 2007, but given the scale of the challenge more needs to be done.

## The Choice

The Rudd-Gillard Government promised that aged care would be a priority in their second term.

While there has been good intent, delivery has been lacking and progress protracted. The Government did not respond to the *Caring for Older Australians* report for more than 250 days. Legislation was not introduced into the Parliament for a further 327 days.

The Rudd-Gillard Government only legislated changes in the final weeks of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Parliament. Most of the measures will not commence until 2014.

There must be certainty going forward, with successful implementation of proposed reforms being the focus.

While the Coalition was critical of the Government's delay in responding to the need for reform, we engaged constructively in the process and have supported the intent of the Productivity Commission report. The reforms recently agreed to by the Parliament were only a first step. Services for our ageing population aren't 'fixed'. The reforms will need to



be implemented, monitored and built upon to ensure Australia has a strong and flexible system into the future.

Only the Coalition has the proven track record of good economic management and competent administration to manage and resource much needed aged care reforms.

One of the failings of Labor's package is that it did not address the antiquated regulatory process for an over-burdened sector. Those providing care should have all the support and flexibility they need to remain free to do what they do best – delivering high quality, dignified care. Aged care nurses spend, on average, one third of their time doing paperwork. The last thing the ageing sector needs is more red tape that unnecessarily diverts resources from the provision of care to filling in forms.

The Coalition will take immediate steps to address this failing. We will work with stakeholders to formalise a five year *Healthy Life, Better Ageing Agreement* to ensure the successful implementation and monitoring of reforms, reduce the administrative burden and restore stability and flexibility to the sector as a whole. This will provide greater investment certainty and allow easier and more direct input into government decisions.

To give effect to the *Healthy Life, Better Ageing Agreement*, the Coalition will immediately establish a high level Steering Committee to oversee the development and implementation of the agreement. It is envisaged that the Steering Committee will cover the broad spectrum of stakeholder interests including: community and residential care providers, seniors and retirees; consumers; carers; wellbeing; palliative care; financial and banking; pharmacy, medical and allied health; workforce and union; and local, state and federal governments.

## Cost

The Coalition has committed to boost funding by \$40 million each year for dementia research over five years at a total cost of \$200 million.



Hope.  
Reward.  
Opportunity.



**THE NATIONALS** *for Regional Australia*

For further details of the Coalition's Plan go to  
[www.realsolutions.org.au](http://www.realsolutions.org.au)