



## Special Commission of Inquiry into Healthcare Funding

**Submission Number:** 116  
**Name:** Uniting NSW.ACT  
**Date Received:** 14/11/2023



Special Commission of Inquiry into Healthcare Funding  
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14 November 2023

### **Submission in response to the Commission of Inquiry into Healthcare Funding**

We welcome the opportunity to provide feedback on the Special Commission of Inquiry into Healthcare Funding (the Commission).

Uniting NSW.ACT contributes to the work of the Uniting Church in NSW and the ACT, through social justice advocacy, community services and spiritual care. We provide services for all people through all ages and stages of life, and drive solutions to systemic issues so people experiencing disadvantage can live their best lives. Our purpose is to inspire people, enliven communities and confront injustice. We value diversity and always welcome everyone exactly as they are.

We commend the NSW Government on the establishment of the Commission to support the safe delivery of high quality, timely, equitable and accessible patient-centred care and health services to the people of NSW, now and into the future.

This submission is informed by our work in providing residential aged care services to nearly eight thousand clients in 2022/23. We recognise that aged care is primarily a Commonwealth Government responsibility. However, there are many intersections between the health and aged care systems, and we believe that many of the challenges facing the aged care sector are also applicable to the healthcare sector. We have provided a short summary of our experiences and recommendations to improve the quality of care provided by both the aged care and healthcare systems.

We encourage the Commission to view aged care as a critical component within the healthcare setting which supports the wellbeing of older Australians. State-based health services will benefit from a more effective aged care sector which is able to meet the needs of older Australians, including avoiding unnecessary entry into hospitals.

#### **Workforce shortages**

From July 2023, aged care providers were required to ensure that at least one Registered Nurse (RN) is on-site and on duty at all times in a residential aged care facility. The intent of this reform is to reduce the risk of resident harm by ensuring qualified and experienced care staff are always available to identify and address potential risks. In doing so, the

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reforms will also reduce the burden on the state-based healthcare systems by avoiding unnecessary attendance at emergency rooms through on-site medical support.

The unintended consequence of this reform is the exacerbation of existing workforce shortages, because both the aged care system and the healthcare system are seeking to attract and retain more RNs. Particularly in regional and remote communities where shortages are particularly acute, the competition between health and aged care systems is reducing the ability of both to fulfil their regulatory requirements.

Furthermore, the lack of available and affordable accommodation in regional and remote areas hampers the ability of residential aged care providers to attract RNs to roles in these areas. As we understand, this is also the experience of healthcare providers and hospitals outside metropolitan areas.

We believe that the NSW government has a responsibility to ensure that all residents of NSW have access to essential services and as such, must also accept responsibility for ensuring that there is appropriate infrastructure to support essential workers.

The NSW government should take an active role in encouraging RNs and other healthcare providers to move to regional and remote communities and ensure that there is adequate housing to meet their needs. This could be achieved by directly funding social housing to be managed by the NSW government or in partnership with not-for-profit housing providers within the regions.

- **Recommendation:** That the NSW government support the development of affordable housing in regional and remote communities to support the attraction of essential workers in these regions.
- **Recommendation:** That the NSW government establish incentives to attract essential workers to move to regional areas.

### **The role of technology**

We believe that technology is an important tool to ensure continuity of care between aged care and the hospital system. This can enhance information sharing, reduce duplication of effort, and improve outcomes for older people. Effective transitions between hospital and aged care settings can reduce costs, avoid re-entries into the healthcare system and support the wellbeing of older people. In regional areas, public hospitals and residential aged care facilities are often important sites for local IT infrastructure, and can help improve continuity of care through other services such as home and community aged care, and primary and allied health.

The NSW Government should ensure the need for technological collaboration and interoperability with other parts of the health and aged care systems is taken into account when developing and rolling out plans for technology in the public health system.

Please do not hesitate to contact us for further information.

Yours sincerely,



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