



**Recommendations regarding the**

**Draft National Aged Care**

**Advocacy Framework**

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## 1. Background

The Australian Government Department of Health (the department) is developing a new National Advocacy Framework (the Framework). The aim of the Framework is to guide the provision of individual advocacy services delivered through the National Aged Care Advocacy Program (NACAP), funded by the Department. The Framework will set the key principles, priorities and outcomes that will enable NACAP providers to deliver effective and high quality aged care advocacy services and provide support to NACAP providers to achieve a nationally consistent approach.<sup>1</sup>

**Meaningful Ageing Australia** (formerly PASCOP) is the Australian national peak body for spiritual care and ageing. We are a not-for-profit incorporated association, supporting organisations and groups to respond to the pastoral and spiritual needs of older people, their significant others, and their carers. Our mission is to ensure that all older Australians have access to high quality pastoral and spiritual care. Our members are organisations and groups who support, care for and/or accommodate older people. We have begun our work by focussing on the aged care sector; this is reflected in our current membership.

**Spirituality** is bigger than religion. It is “the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred”.<sup>2</sup> For some people this has a religious expression, and for others it does not.

Spiritual care is by necessity profoundly person-centred and orientated around collaboration and networks. It is deeply embedded in understanding and enhancing the experience of the older person who is engaged with the aged care system by knowing what is most important for him/her. The choices that an older person is presented with in consumer directed care should not be limited, for example, to what type of meal or the time of day that the carer comes to the house. Each organisation should know how to engage with the older person around their sources of meaning, purpose and connectedness; and build this in to ongoing care plans.

## 2. Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft National Aged Care Advocacy Framework. As Australian aged care moves towards a consumer-directed system, the role of the National Aged Care Advocacy Program (NACAP) will become even more important in ensuring the rights of all consumers, and in particular the most vulnerable, are protected.

## 3. Recommended additions and changes

### 3.1 Services, scope and eligibility – expansion of education

Comments: It is stated that the NACAP will meet its objectives through the “delivery of education sessions promoting aged care consumer rights to eligible older people”. Eligible older people are those engaged with Commonwealth subsidised services.

The point of engagement with the aged care system, particularly residential aged care, comes at a time of crisis for many people. As Australia moves towards consumer-directed care it will be important for consumers to be equipped to deal with the system *prior to engagement*. The Aged Care Sector Committee’s Aged Care Road Map<sup>3</sup> notes this need for older people and their families to engage in

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<sup>1</sup> Draft National Aged Care Advocacy Framework, [https://consultations.health.gov.au/ageing-and-aged-care/consultation-on-the-development-plan-for-the-natio/consult\\_view](https://consultations.health.gov.au/ageing-and-aged-care/consultation-on-the-development-plan-for-the-natio/consult_view)

<sup>2</sup> Puchalski, C.M., Vitillo, R., Hull, S.K., Reller, N. (2014). Improving the spiritual dimension of whole person care: Reaching national and international consensus. *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, 17(6), 642-656.

<sup>3</sup> Published 2016, available from [https://agedcare.health.gov.au/sites/g/files/net1426/f/documents/04\\_2016/strategic\\_roadmap\\_for\\_aged\\_care\\_web.pdf](https://agedcare.health.gov.au/sites/g/files/net1426/f/documents/04_2016/strategic_roadmap_for_aged_care_web.pdf)

conversations about aged care before they are ‘forced’ into contact with the system. Offering education to people *after* they have engaged with the system means that they are not empowered to make a fully informed choice at the time of engagement. In order to a) be fully informed and b) be able to deal with the NACAP information, it is important that the education on offer occurs with a much broader group than those who are already engaged with the system.

It is also important to recognise the role of the older person’s networks in their support and decision-making. This means that education about aged care consumer rights should be targeted to a much wider group, including families, faith communities, seniors networks and more.

**Recommendations:**

- Meaningful Ageing Australia is recommending an expansion of who the education targets to include: older people prior to potential engagement with the aged care system and includes
- their formal and informal networks.

Currently *services, scope and eligibility* refers to education for *aged care providers* to promote consumer rights – for similar reasons stated above, this should be broadened to include other services that are engaged with older people such as community health, acute and especially sub-acute services who are key referrers into the aged care system. This builds capacity into the whole system to support older people to have their rights upheld.

**Recommendation:**

- Add targeted education within relevant services and community supports outside the aged care system.

### 3.2 Description of broader issues impacting on an older person’s inability to live at home

Comments: It is well known that social isolation is major issue for older Australians and can impact profoundly on a person’s health and wellbeing. “Over the last couple of decades, the proportion of the population aged 15 years and over living alone (in private dwellings) increased from 9% to 12%, and over the next 20 years is projected to increase to 16% (3.1 million).”<sup>4</sup>

**Recommendation:**

- In the paragraph describing the broader issues that may contribute to an older person’s inability to live in their own home, it is our recommendation to add *social isolation*.

### 3.3 NACAP Target Groups (p.4)

Comments: *Target groups* includes a paragraph about effective engagement with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups. This paragraph mentions the use of interpreter services. It would be further strengthened by the inclusion of a requirement to have translated material in a wide range of languages; and targeted education for CALD communities that takes into account cultural sensitivities that may impact on consumers engaging/refusing to engage with the NACAP.

**Recommendation:**

- Include a requirement to translate material into community languages and
- include a requirement for tailored education for CALD communities.

### 3.4 A coordinated approach – key interactions, partnerships and interfaces with NACAP providers and other services (p.4)

Comments: This is currently a list of professional services. It is important to consider the older person in their context beyond professional networks. This means the list of agencies and services should be expanded to include *relevant social networks and communities*. This could incorporate faith communities and neighbourhood centres, for example.

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<sup>4</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Social Trends, 4102.0, 2009  
<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features20Dec+2009>

**Recommendation:**

- Expand *key interactions, partnerships and interfaces* to include *social networks* and the *consumers' community*.

## 4. Recommendations for further work on the NACAP Guidelines

The Australian Government Department of Health funded a project to develop National Guidelines for Spiritual Care in Aged Care (the Guidelines)<sup>5</sup> that were launched in August this year. The Guidelines reflect best-practice in spiritual care. They were developed following a literature review to establish an evidence-based framework, and fieldwork that involved close consultation with experts and the sector. The Guidelines demonstrate that spirituality - meaning, purpose and connectedness - are essential for older peoples' wellbeing.

- 4.1 It is important that the Guidelines for Spiritual Care in Aged Care inform the work of the NACAP. Many consumers are unaware that they have a right to spiritual care (in the form of religiously-specific spiritual care when it is relevant to do so as well as more broadly), and that this should be part of the conversation about what they need when engaging with aged services. This aligns with the NACAP objective of *supporting older people with information about their rights and responsibilities*.
- 4.2 Due to the limited understanding of spirituality and spiritual care amongst consumers and advocacy groups, it will be important to include education for organisations who are part of NACAP about the meaning and place of spirituality in care; as well as consumers. This aligns with the objective of the NACAP of ensuring older people *have their rights better understood*. Meaningful Ageing Australia can assist with this.
- 4.3 It is important to have outcome data that also looks for the *experience* of the older person in engaging with the advocacy system. Otherwise, there is a risk that outcomes could be presented as 'successful' when the *process* to obtaining the outcome may have a negative impact on the older person. The process needs to match the goal of the advocacy system that "appropriately and sufficiently"<sup>6</sup> supports older people.

## 5. Conclusion

Thank you again for this opportunity. Advocacy will be increasingly important for older people as they seek to have their individual needs met by aged care services. If you require any further clarification or assistance we can be contacted at the address on the front.

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<sup>5</sup> Available from <http://meaningfulageing.org.au/national-guidelines-for-spiritual-care-in-aged-care-documents/>

<sup>6</sup> Draft National Advocacy Framework, p.1.