



Respect, recognition and quality care for older Australians

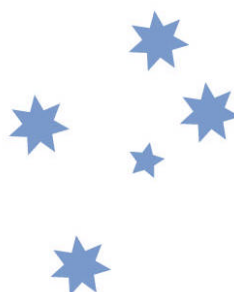
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Policy Document



A Federal Labor Government will give older Australians the support and resources they need to enjoy peace of mind while living in residential care.

Labor will restore public confidence in residential aged care and acknowledge the contribution and role of older Australians in our community and to our national identity.

We owe our ageing parents, grandparents and all older Australians the best care and support a nation can give.

Under the Howard Government, the needs of older Australians are being neglected.

After 8 years of inaction, the Howard Government finally responded to the Hogan Review into Aged Care with a package of Budget measures that were long overdue.

A Federal Labor Government will honour the commitments made in the May 2004 Budget by delivering the full package of aged care measures costing \$2.184 billion over the forward estimates.

But more needs to be done to build a world class aged care system for the future.

In addition to supporting the May 2004 Budget measures, Labor will:

- Guarantee that accommodation bonds are not extended to medium and high aged care residents.
- Provide \$300 million in interest free loans to build more residential and respite facilities, including \$100 million to build more appropriate residential living arrangements for young people currently living in aged care facilities.
- Introduce a Benchmark of Care during Labor's first term of office to restore public confidence in the quality of residential care for older Australians, and maintain a rigorous system of spot checks to ensure a high standard of residential care.
- Review the adequacy of, and planning for, aged care places.
- Establish an Aged Care Ombudsman to protect the rights of older Australians in care.
- Provide comprehensive dental health assessments for older Australians upon admission to an aged care facility.
- Implement an Active Ageing Agenda to strengthen older Australians' participation in community life.
- Address the national shortage of skilled aged care nurses and workers.

No accommodation bonds in medium and high care

Labor will not extend accommodation bonds to medium and high aged care residents.

The Howard Government has demonstrated that it is committed to extending aged care accommodation bonds if it is re-elected. The Government has refused to support a Labor amendment to the Aged Care Act to prevent the extension of aged care accommodation bonds.

Under Labor, there will be no extension of accommodation bonds and no question of having to sell the family home in order to secure an aged care place in medium or high care.

Interest free loans to expand facilities

Labor will provide \$300 million in interest free loans to build more residential and respite facilities.

Loans will be available for aged care providers to expand facilities in areas where there is a shortage of beds for permanent and respite care, and in underserved areas such as caring for the specific needs of residents with dementia.

Labor will fast track interest free loans to those providers who begin building facilities immediately, to bring new places online as swiftly as possible.

This will include \$100 million in interest free loans to develop more appropriate residential living environments for young people living in aged care facilities.

Too many young people with a disability who need accommodation are in aged care residences alongside frail and elderly residents. This situation is unfair, unworkable and inappropriate for both young and older residents.

A new Benchmark of Care

Labor will introduce an industry Benchmark of Care in our first term in office to restore public confidence in the quality of residential care for older Australians.

The Benchmark of Care will:

- Provide a clear set of standards for the level and quality of residential care, in consultation with community, industry, employees and their representatives.
- Include minimum staffing guidelines to be developed in consultation with community, industry and employee representatives.
- Provide peace of mind and security to Australian families about the care their loved ones receive and ensure that funding is tied to clear quality of care outcomes.

Labor will make recent increased funding for better workforce conditions and quality of care conditional on meeting criteria which may include competitive wages for staff, workplace training, staffing levels and best practice health,

safety and hygiene protocols. Performance against these criteria will be based on clear clinical indicators developed as part of Labor's Benchmark of Care.

Labor will also strengthen accreditation arrangements to ensure quality of care. The Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency's (ACSAA) dual role as a regulator and accrediting body is unworkable. Under Labor, the ACSAA will focus on monitoring and regulating aged care facilities and will have a new role of ensuring compliance with Benchmark of Care standards.

In addition to strengthening accreditation arrangements, Labor will also ensure there is a rigorous system of spot checks of aged care facilities to guarantee the highest standards of residential care for older Australians.

Review aged care places

In its first term, a Federal Labor Government will undertake a comprehensive review of the adequacy of the overall ratio of places to population, and the balance between residential and community care, to make sure that older Australians get the type of care they need.

Labor will progressively increase the lead times for the allocation of places from three to five years. This will reduce waiting lists and help make sure beds are available when elderly people need them. Labor will also maintain a 'ready list' of providers who can immediately make places available or have new places available in the near future.

Labor will also work closely with state and territory governments to develop a system for the future identification and banking of land for aged care residences.

An Aged Care Ombudsman

Labor will establish an Aged Care Ombudsman to protect the right of elderly Australians to safe, respectful and quality residential and community care.

The Aged Care Ombudsman will replace the Aged Care Complaints Commissioner and reform the Complaints Resolution Scheme. Labor will invest \$3.2 million over the forward estimates to establish this position.

The Howard Government's Complaints Resolution Scheme has repeatedly failed to resolve serious health and safety complaints about inadequate residential and community care.

Aged care providers, residents, older Australians receiving care in the community, and their families need a complaints mechanism that is more effective and fair.

The Aged Care Ombudsman will investigate all serious complaints as a matter of urgency and undertake investigations and will work with the sector to promote the effective resolution of internal complaints.

Dental assessments for older Australians in care

Labor will provide \$13 million over the forward estimates to ensure that every person, on admittance to an aged care residential facility, receives an oral health assessment and a written 'action plan' from a qualified dental professional, setting out the appropriate measures for their oral health.

Loss of teeth, ill-fitting dentures and painful gums all impact on the diet and overall health of older people, often with serious consequences. Many medicines cause 'dry mouth syndrome' which can lead to gum disease. Aged care residents of nursing homes can find it difficult to get oral hygiene and dental care due to their frailty and limited mobility.

When an older or disabled person is admitted to a residential care facility, they currently undergo an assessment of their health needs, but this rarely includes an oral health assessment. Under Labor, such an assessment will be a requirement of admittance to residential care. This will enable immediate problems to be addressed, as well as the development of a long term dental care plan appropriate to the needs of each individual. These plans may focus on the need for teeth cleaning, antibacterial mouthwashes, special toothpastes, and attention to dry mouth syndrome.

Labor will fund the development of a training manual for personal care attendants on how to provide dental care for the frail elderly. This will ensure that nursing home operators give priority to the issue of oral health care, and that staff have the knowledge to include these basic techniques in their daily routine.

Labor's Active Ageing Agenda: combating loneliness and isolation

Today's older Australians have fewer close relatives, who live further away and lead busier lives. Many lack social contact and feel lonely and isolated.

More than 600,000 Australians aged over 65 live alone.

An older person who is no longer working, no longer caring for others, and no longer contributing to the community is deprived of many of life's motivations. Contributing and belonging lie at the heart of self-esteem and social connection.

To address the growing epidemic of loneliness in our community, we need to generate opportunities for emotional engagement, not deliver emotional charity. More human contact is a crucial part of tackling loneliness and isolation, but it must be associated with purpose. An older person able to help others, use their expertise and experience and contribute to the community is more likely to develop a strong social network and overcome loneliness and isolation.

The Howard Government acknowledged this problem in its National Strategy for an Ageing Australia (2000) but has done little about it. A Federal Labor Government will address this issue.

A Federal Labor Government will provide \$4 million over three years, commencing in 2005-06, to local councils and community organisations to develop senior citizens registers and trial pilot programs to reconnect isolated older Australians with community life.

Labor's Active Ageing Agenda will comprise a range of community initiatives:

- Partnerships with local councils and community organisations to encourage volunteering and participation in community activities amongst older Australians, as well as piloting local strategies to overcome social and physical isolation like community buses and car pools.
- A 'Get Fit, Stay Well' national audit of programs to determine the best way to encourage older Australians to be fit and look after their wellbeing.
- Ensuring Labor's National Mentoring Foundation targets older Australians for mentoring activities.

More skilled aged care workers

\$1,000 Training Bonus for aged care workers

A Federal Labor Government will provide \$1.3 million over four years to trial a \$1,000 Training Bonus for trainees who complete training in priority areas.

Aged care trainees will be eligible to receive this training bonus.

From July 2005, up to 1,300 priority trainees – including aged care trainees – will be eligible to receive the \$1,000 Bonus.

Aged care workers who have left the industry and want to update their skills will also be eligible for the \$1,000 Training Bonus to encourage them to return and complete their training.

Currently around 4 in every 10 New Apprentices do not complete their training, often discouraged by low training wages.

Labor's \$1,000 Bonus will encourage people to finish training in aged care and will be paid in two \$500 instalments on completion of each year of the traineeship.

More aged care nurses

The \$1,000 Training Bonus builds on Labor's commitment to create 700 new full time and part time undergraduate places for nursing students by 2007. This will mean that by 2010 Australian nursing schools will be graduating around an extra 1,800 new nurses every year. Labor will also provide 500 new full time post-graduate nursing HECS places by 2006, so that by 2007 there will be an extra 1,000 specialist nurses graduating every year.

As a priority, Labor will reduce the paperwork required by nurses so they can spend more quality time caring for residents.

Labor's Respect, recognition and quality care for older Australians is fully funded and costed

These measures are in addition to Labor's commitment to deliver the May 2004 Budget aged care measures costing \$2.184 billion over the forward estimates.

Capital measures

	\$ million	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	Total
Interest free loans for new aged care facilities		200	-	-	-	200*
Interest free loans for new aged care facilities (young people)		100	-	-	-	100*

* The cost to the budget of these capital investments is the public debt interest expense based on the long term bond rate of 5.4%. For new aged care facilities this is a cash cost of \$10.8 million per annum, a total cost of \$37.8 million over the forward estimates. For New aged care facilities (young people) this is a cash cost of \$5.4 million per annum, a total cost of \$18.9 million over the forward estimates.

Recurrent measures

	\$ million	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	Total
Active Ageing Agenda		0	1	1	2	4
Aged Care Ombudsman		0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	3.2
Dental assessments for elderly in care [#]		0	4	4	5	13
Training Bonus [#]		0	0.3	0.5	0.5	1.3
Budget impact		0.8	6.1	6.3	8.3	21.5

[#] Previously announced funding.