



Aged care a crisis in the making

AN overhaul of the aged-care system is needed to avoid an imminent crisis, a coalition of 28 groups has warned the federal government.

The group, including health professionals, unions and charitable organisations, has warned the aged-care system designed for Australia in the 1960s is now buckling and in need of urgent reform.

Launching the Australians Deserve to Age Well campaign yesterday, the group said that by 2050 the system would need to support 3.5 million older citizens.

That represents more than three times the current load, Council of the Ageing chief executive Ian Yates said.

The coalition, which also includes the Australian Healthcare and Hospital Association and the Health Services Union, has called for bipartisan support for the recommendations of the Productivity Commission's report entitled *Caring For Older Australians*, released in August.

The commission suggested older Australians contribute up to \$60,000 for aged care and face "uncapped" charges for nursing-home accommodation.

"Many older Australians are already struggling to find the services they need to continue to live at home or are on long waiting lists for residential care," Mr Yates said. "Just trying to find out where to go for information on aged care is so complicated that even the most educated professionals struggle to work it out."

"Both government and opposition must commit to implement the Productivity Commission's recommendations now."

Martin Laverty, chief executive of Catholic Health Australia, said the system was underfunded for future needs.

"If we don't build new residential care facilities now there will be a chronic shortage of beds in three, four and 20 years' time," he said. "Yet as the current system stands there is a disincentive for investment in this area."

Reforms were also needed to attract 500,000 more workers the system will need by 2050, Australian Nursing Federation secretary Lee Thomas said.

"There is a shortage of about 20,000 nurses in aged care now," she said.