



Funding boost to support growing aged care need



MINISTER for Ageing Justine Elliot yesterday announced \$9.5m in nursing scholarships to train and upskill up to 680 people, particularly in rural and regional areas.

Ms Elliot made the announcement during the three-day 19th annual Tri-state aged care conference at the Sir Robert Helpmann Theatre, which attracted representatives of the aged care sector from New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia.

She said the scholarships would play an important role in improving the quality of care and help build the aged care workforce in the future.

"The funding will support undergraduate and postgraduate nurses predominantly living in rural, regional and remote Australia," she said.

Ms Elliot said the scholarship funding, administered by the Royal College of Nursing Australia, included up to 560 scholarships worth \$8.7m for tertiary students commencing their studies this year, and up to 120 scholarships worth \$800,000 which open for applications on March 6.

The scholarship funding is in addition to the \$135m the Federal Government has provided for the training of more than 21,600 aged care workers.

"These scholarships are a practical way to encourage people to enter the aged care sector and to encourage nurses in the industry to expand their skills and career prospects," she said.

"As our population ages, we will need more people working in aged

care, but it is important that we have people with the right training and skills."

Ms Elliot said the number of people aged 65 to 84 years is projected to double by 2050, while the number of people aged 85 and over will more than quadruple.

"That means that nearly a quarter of the population will be aged 65 years or more, compared with 13pc today," she said.

However, Ms Elliot said the Federal Government last year provided subsidised services to at least 300,000 people.

"Over the last two years more than 10,000 aged care places have become operational and funding for services has increased by nearly 20pc," she said.

"We continue to make substantial investments in training and skills development for the aged care workforce to build on the high level of skills (provided by the aged care industry) in the interest of continuing to drive care standards upwards."

Meanwhile, tri-state conference speaker, Catholic Health Australia (CHA) chief executive Martin Laverty, told delegates that although the government has acknowledged that the age care industry needed improvement, "something had to be done urgently".

CHA, the largest non-government provider grouping of health, community and aged care services in Australia, has released an aged care policy blueprint.

The policy, A Better Way Forward,

outlines how older Australians can achieve a better quality of life while enabling the government to save money by broadening access to at-home aged care.

Recommendations in the policy include scrapping the Howard Government's Aged Care Act 1997 allocation formula for funding aged care places, and replacing it with a Medicare style entitlement and setting care payments in both residential and community care services at equal amounts to create choice as to whether care is delivered in a person's home or in a residential aged care facility.

“The number of people aged 65 to 84 years is projected to double by 2050, while the number of people aged 85 and over will more than quadruple. A quarter of the population will be aged 65 years or more, compared with 13pc today”

-Justine Elliot