



Annual Work Plan

2025–26

From aspiration to action: Realising human rights and person-centred care in aged care

Publication information

Acknowledgement of Country

The Office of the Inspector-General of Aged Care acknowledges the traditional owners of country throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to land, water and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures and to elders both past and present.

Publication details

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Foreword



I am rapt to present the 2025–26 Annual Work Plan, my first as Inspector-General of Aged Care.

It is an absolute privilege to share with you my vision for delivery in 2025–26. The intent of this work plan is to focus the work of my Office on the areas that will make the most meaningful impact on delivering transformational change in aged care. It is all underpinned by the central vision of my Office; an aged care system where every person receives kind, compassionate, high-quality care that promotes their rights, identity and independence.

With the introduction of the new *Aged Care Act 2024* there is real momentum to shine a spotlight on the opportunities to bring the legislated commitment to kind, dignified, self-determined, rights-based aged care

to life. And to make sure that the voice of those with lived experience who are currently using or trying to access aged care, is centred in designing the future.

The theme of this year's Annual Work Plan is: ***From aspiration to action: Realising human rights and person-centred care in aged care.***

This year our work will be sharply focussed on ways the government can ensure the vision of the new *Aged Care Act 2024* is implemented, and not just theoretical. It reflects the voices of our stakeholders, who we have listened to, and who have told us their experiences of the system as providers, advocates, peak bodies and individuals with lived experience.

Before you jump in to read this, there are a couple of things you should know. The themes and topics of this work plan are not simply driven by my own interest, nor are they a gut-response. We asked the community and a diverse group of stakeholders: what would make the greatest change in propelling the aged care system we have now into the one envisaged by the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety? What would be most influential in achieving a system that each and every one of you would feel fulfilled and happy to grow old within?

The reports, activities and products we generate from this proposed plan of work will seek to differentiate our approach from business-as-usual government oversight by centring the people our Office exists to advocate on behalf of — older people in Australia — in our processes just as much as our end-products. We aim to produce materials that have been generated from different vantage points and in engaging formats, that are very practical and digestible, all the while providing a dynamic and robust evidence base for future policy reform. The impact we drive from our oversight activities will be as much about the way in

which we collaboratively develop them, how we use them and share them, as it is about their content.

I am also very excited to share that this financial year we will institute and embed our systemic oversight of the way the Commonwealth manages complaints across the aged care system; a distinct objective of my own establishing legislation.

As the Inspector-General, I have a mandate to call out where government can improve the administration, regulation and funding of the system, and to highlight areas where things are working well. This year's work plan provides a balance between assessing current practices, highlighting innovative models and providing recommendations for continuous improvement.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Natalie Siegel-Brown', with a stylized, cursive script.

Natalie Siegel-Brown

Inspector-General of Aged Care

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1.Introduction: Development of the Annual Work Plan

The *Inspector-General of Aged Care Act 2023* (the IGAC Act) requires the Inspector-General to prepare a work plan for each financial year. This work plan must set out the key outcomes and priorities for the Inspector-General for the year, including any reviews that the Inspector-General intends to conduct under section 17 of the IGAC Act.

The work plan is underpinned by the outcomes against which the Inspector-General commits to in our Strategic Framework (outlined below) which sets out how the Office will deliver on its legislative functions, including the rationale for what should fall in, and outside of our work.

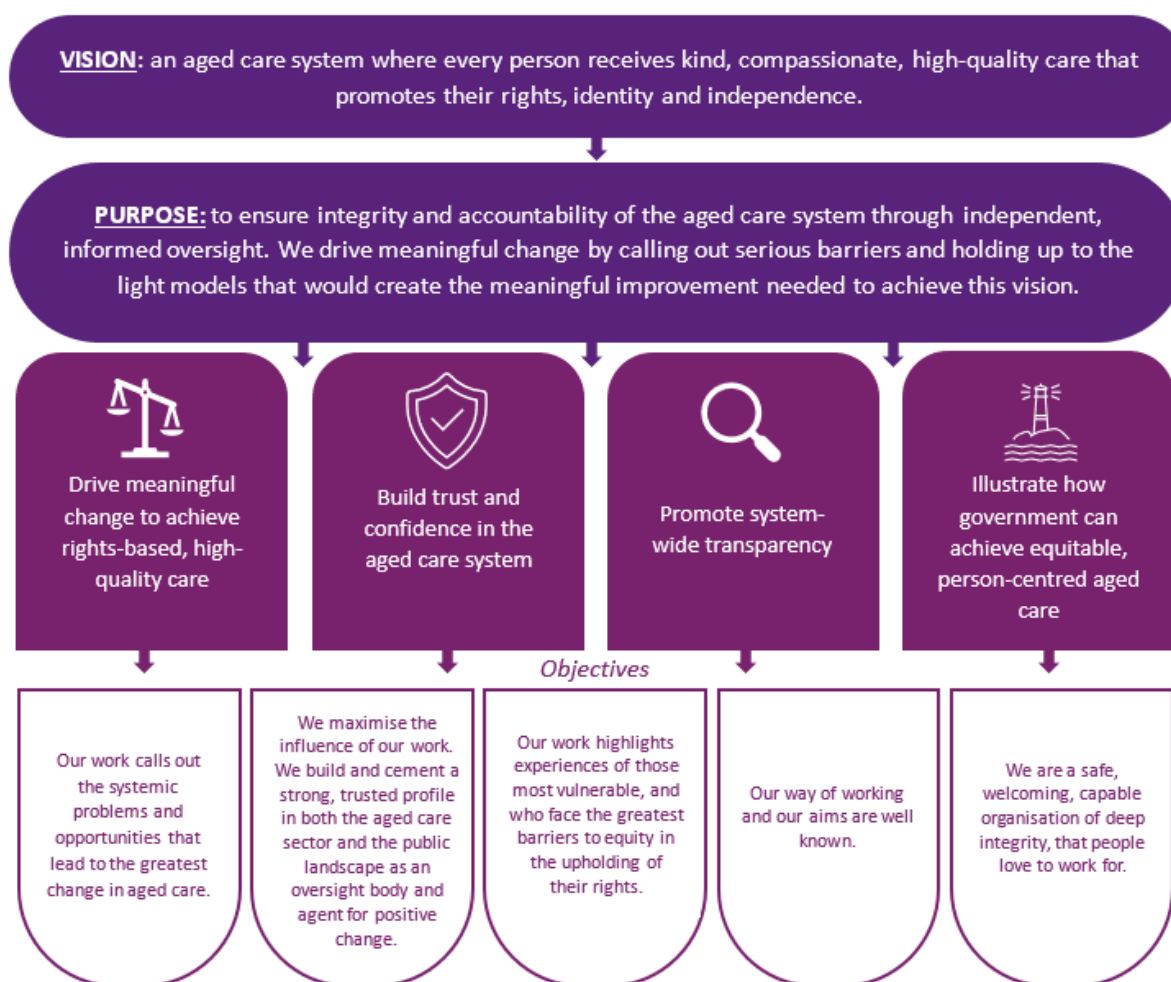


Figure 1: Office of the Inspector-General Strategic Framework

1.1 Structure of the work plan

This work plan clearly demarcates the projects and activities to monitor, investigate and report to Parliament on the government's administration, funding and regulation of the aged care system that the Office will commence in 2025–26 and provides an outline of the Inspector-General's future priorities. The work plan is structured as follows:

- **Section 2 – Reviews:** this section outlines the reviews that the Inspector-General will conduct under the section 17 of the IGAC Act in the 2025–26 financial year.
- **Section 3 – Driving change through oversight:** this section highlights the focus areas that the Office will commence work on in 2025–26, reflecting the key topics that have received overwhelming support from stakeholders as areas where government can enable transformative change.
- **Section 4 – Monitoring:** this section provides an overview of the current priority areas for the Office's monitoring program.
- **Section 5 – Looking forward:** this section signals several priority areas raised by stakeholders that will be monitored over 2025–26 for potential progression as major reviews, projects or reports in the near future.
- **Section 6 – Conclusion.**

Notably, the key activities outlined under **sections 3 – 5** have been further delineated into three main themes including: *'human rights'*, *'an equitable and sustainable aged care system and reliable safeguarding'* and *'safeguarding the system'*. These themes were identified as pivotal to informing the Inspector-General's program of work throughout the stakeholder engagement and consultation processes outlined in **section 1.2** below.

The Office is committed to ongoing transparency and will publish a variation to the work plan should priorities shift or change through the year as the work progresses.

1.2 How did we decide our key focus topics for 2025–2026?

To truly hear the views of people with lived experience and the diversity of stakeholders within the sector the Inspector-General and her Office seek to enact *Dadirri*, or deep listening and *Garma*, or two-way learning.

In determining the focus topics for the annual work plan, the Inspector-General has sought input from across the aged care sector emphasising the voices of people with lived experience of the aged care system, including access barriers. The Inspector-General also engaged with advocacy organisations, government departments and regulators, aged care providers, peak bodies, advisory bodies and the aged care workforce.

The choice of topics has been informed by extensive feedback received by the Office since its establishment in 2023, as well as a distillation of the issues raised through a series of stakeholder forums that were held to inform the development of the *2025 Progress Report on the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety*. Throughout this process, the Inspector-General sought to gain a deeper understanding of the following question: **"if the aged care system is not yet realising the vision of delivering human rights and high-quality care codified by the new Aged Care Act 2024 (the new Act), then what would bring about the most impactful changes to achieve the transformation to which the government, sector and community all aspire?"**

It was identified that, the answers to this question clearly reflected the Office's explicit mandate to focus its work on the '*systemic problems and opportunities that lead to the greatest change in aged care*'.

From this position, more than 20 potential focus topics and several key overarching themes emerged. Further work was then undertaken within the Office to concentrate these into ten potential topics grouped under three main themes for further targeted consultation. This process included consideration of the following:

- issues and concerns raised by stakeholders through consultation and feedback processes outlined above
- extensive work already being undertaken by other organisations and government agencies where the value the Office could contribute may be more limited
- availability of relevant data in 2025–26 to deliver definitive conclusions and effective recommendations
- resources available within the Office to undertake the work, and
- the views of the Inspector-General in relation to those areas where the Office can best support true and effective transformational change.

A second internal process was then undertaken within the Office to identify the top five issues for progression in 2025–26 (from a staff perspective). The top 10 potential topics were also presented separately to a targeted group of stakeholders, through a series of additional consultations, to seek their views and ensure that the Office had determined the most critical issues for further investigation.

As indicated in Figure 2 below, the topics in the **pink** boxes reflect those that were regarded by both the Office and stakeholders as the five most impactful for driving change in the aged care system in the current environment. These topics are outlined in more detail in **section 2** of the work plan.

Of the remaining five issues identified, several will be progressed through the Office's monitoring function (see section 4 of this work plan) or have been earmarked for future consideration in **section 5**.

The five chosen focus projects for 2025–26, distilled from the ten topics identified for further targeted consultation are shaded in pink, in the figure below:

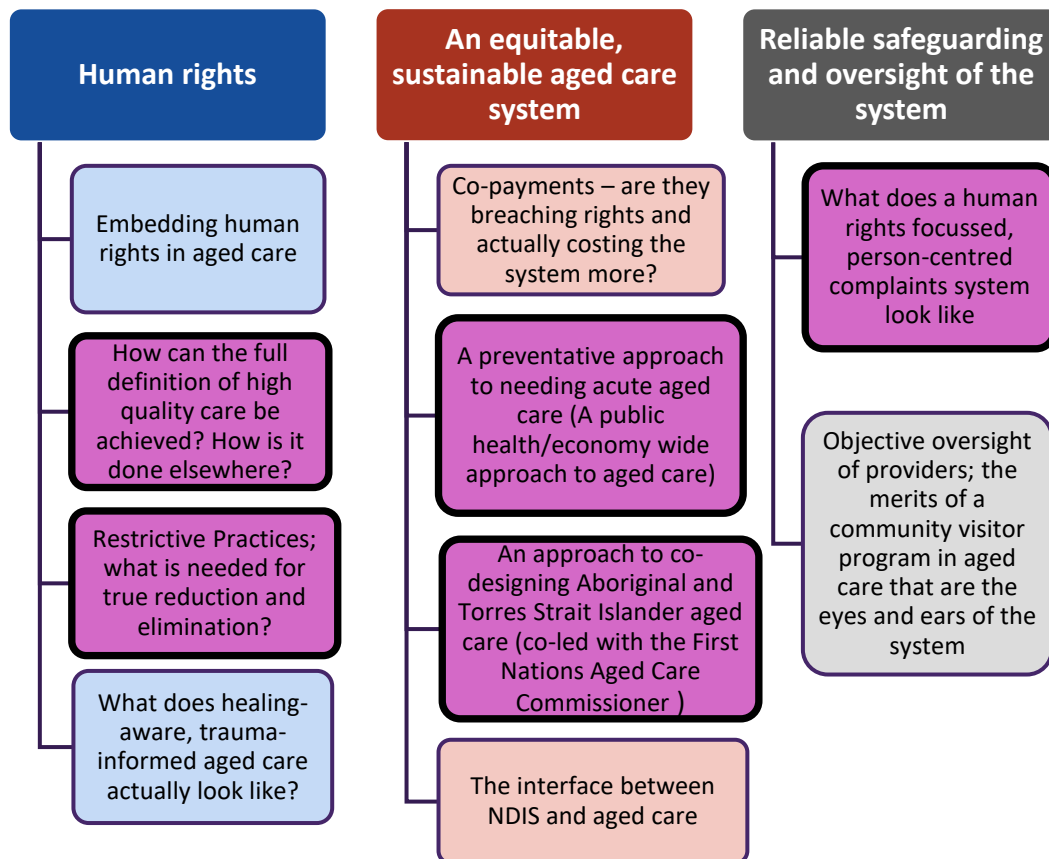


Figure 2: Five chosen focus areas distilled from the top ten focus topics identified for consideration in the 2025–26 Annual Work Plan.

2. Reviews

The IGAC Act empowers the Inspector-General to conduct reviews into systemic issues in the aged care system and report to the Minister and Parliament on these matters. Undertaking reviews is one of the primary means through which the Office seeks to address long-standing issues, or the effectiveness of new reforms, in the government's administration of the aged care system.

Through these reviews, the Office aims to drive meaningful change in the system and illustrate how government can realise the rights-based, equitable, person-centred aged care system envisioned by the Royal Commission and codified by the new Act.

Planned activities for 2025–26

2.1 Finalise the Review of the Administration of My Aged Care

On 26 March 2024, the former Acting Inspector-General of Aged Care, Mr Ian Yates AM, commenced a review on the Administration of My Aged Care, pursuant to section 18(2A) of the IGAC Act. This inaugural review considers whether My Aged Care, as the single-entry point to the aged care system, is fit-for-purpose in facilitating timely access to aged care services and supports for all older people in Australia, regardless of their location, background and life experiences.

In undertaking this review, the Office has engaged widely with older people seeking and receiving aged care services, their families and carers, aged care stakeholders, advocacy services and relevant peak bodies, health professionals, aged care assessor organisations, as well as government agencies and external providers responsible for the administration and delivery of My Aged Care. The Office has received written and oral submissions, undertaken consultations, and has also requested specific information from government agencies and external providers.

The final report of the review is expected to be provided to the Minister for Aged Care and Seniors in early October 2025 and must be tabled in Parliament within 15 sitting days of receipt.

2.2 Commence the Review of the Implementation of Aged Care Royal Commission Recommendations

Section 28 of the IGAC Act requires the Inspector-General to conduct a review to evaluate the implementation by the Commonwealth of the recommendations of the Aged Care Royal Commission with a reporting date of 1 March 2026. The Office notes that parliament is currently considering delaying the deadline for this report to 1 November 2027 (through the Aged Care and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025). The delay will enable this review's findings to properly reflect the impact of the new Act, which has been delayed to 1 November 2025. Pending parliament's consideration of this bill, this review may be removed from the 2025–26 work plan, and appear on that for 2026–27.

3. Driving change through focussed oversight projects

In line with the Inspector-General's ambition to see the rights-based, person-centred, high quality care codified by the new Act realised, the theme for our oversight activities in 2025–2026 will be: *From aspiration to action: Realising human rights and person-centred care in aged care.*

The five bodies of work identified to commence in 2025–26 may not necessarily take the form of lengthy government reports, but will engage the public in a conversation with the ultimate aim of fulfilling the reporting obligations of the Inspector-General under the IGAC Act. Through reporting and other oversight activities, the Office aims to drive change in a way that engages the public, and older people in Australia in particular, in the discourse needed to truly transform Australia's aged care system.

Work to be commenced in 2025–2026

The Inspector-General will commence projects on the following focus areas in 2025–26, engaging with stakeholders and people with lived experience to shape their delivery. All of the activities will inform our legislative functions under section 10 of the IGAC Act and fulfil our objectives under section 3 of the Act. Some projects may result in the production of reports, while others may be progressed through different mediums, such as face-to-face roundtables, discussion papers, webinars or a range of different activities designed to maximise engagement in new thinking, while minimising consultation-fatigue.

3.1 Human rights

Topic	Rationale
How can the full definition of high quality care be achieved?	<p>Section 20 of the new Act comprehensively details an 18-plank right to high quality care that prioritises kindness, compassion and respect, self-determination, dignity, quality of life, mental health and well-being of the individual.</p> <p>However, the government's funding of the aged care system focuses almost solely on clinical care and some elements of restorative care. The Office will consider what incentives, disincentives, and government levers are required to ensure the full notion of high quality care is realised and delivered across the aged care system.</p>
Restrictive practices: What is needed for true reduction and elimination	In almost every other care sector, the paradigm proscribing the use of restrictive practices is 'reduction and elimination'. Aged care is one of the few sectors where the discourse and approach lags. Restrictive

Topic	Rationale
	<p>practices are still being over-used in aged care. This is an egregious breach of the rights of the individual.</p> <p>There are clear lessons from stakeholders and other sectors regarding how major reductions with the aim of elimination of restrictive practices can be achieved, in line with the human rights focus of the new Act.</p>

3.2 An equitable and sustainable aged care system

Topic	Rationale
A preventative approach to needing acute aged care – a preventative health/economy wide approach	<p>The government's explicit policy is to promote the preference of older people in Australia to remain living at home and maintain their independence and connections to community for as long as possible. While the sentiment is also recognised within the new Act, Australia is severely challenged in making this real. More can be done to support people to age in place, rather than enter residential aged care facilities, or hospital. The Office expects that keeping people at home for longer will pay both a human rights and an economic dividend. The Office wants to identify options to invest in preventative care, the likely costs of doing so and potential benefits to each of the hospital system, and aged care systems, at a whole-of-health system level.</p>
Approach to co-designing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care	<p>Consistent with the recommendations of the Royal Commission and the Report from the Interim First Nations Aged Care Commissioner, the Inspector-General sees it as essential that the government develops and delivers models of aged care that are co-designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a matter of urgency. This is aligned with the Priority Reform principles underpinning the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which all governments have agreed to.</p> <p>Together with the Interim First Nations Aged Care Commissioner, Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations and communities to determine the inalienable principles, and sequencing, required to co-design culturally safe and appropriate aged care services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.</p>

3.3 Reliable safeguarding and oversight of the system

Topic	Rationale
What does a human rights-focussed and person-centred complaints system look like?	The broader complaints framework will be critical to the transition to rights-based, person-centred care. The Inspector-General will seek to understand what features make a person-centred, human rights-focussed complaints system work well and where this has been realised in other sectors or other parts of the world. This will feed directly into the manner in which the Office conducts its systemic oversight of the Commonwealth's management of complaints about aged care.

4. Monitoring program

The Inspector-General's monitoring program supports the Office's oversight and scrutiny of the government's administration, regulation and funding of aged care, with a view to establishing a broad intelligence base to assist with identifying risks, emerging trends, and systemic issues across the aged care system.

The monitoring program is informed by data and information drawn from across the aged care sector, the media and other government bodies.

In addition to the ongoing monitoring and environmental scanning of the aged care system, specific efforts will be dedicated to the following activities:

4.1 An equitable and sustainable aged care system

Topic	Rationale
The introduction of co-payments for Support at Home: Impacts on rights and potential unintended consequences.	<p>The Office has consistently heard concerns about the way in which co-payments under Support at Home will be implemented, and the potential for those with limited means or particular vulnerabilities to forego care.</p> <p>The Office will look to closely monitor a broad range of information, as it becomes available, with the aim of identifying any impacts co-payments may be having on people receiving Support at Home.</p>
Waitlist timeframes for assessment and access to aged care	<p>The Office will actively monitor the introduction of the Single Assessment System including the impact on wait times for assessments and access to aged care.</p> <p>The Office will look at the various sources of waitlist data across the full aged care system, including assessment, and access to home and community care as well as residential and respite care. Data pertaining to the broader Single Assessment Service will also be monitored to determine if the introduction of this program is achieving its stated aims of improving the overall assessment process.</p>
The Interface between the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and aged care	<p>Through recent consultations, as well as ongoing engagement with people with lived experience, the Office is acutely aware of the disparity between disability-specific support that is available under NDIS, that may then be lost when people transition to aged care and the serious impacts this may have to their lives.</p> <p>The Office will seek to actively monitor these transitions and investigate the availability of data with the intention of undertaking more targeted activities in future if required.</p>

4.2 Reliable safeguarding and oversight of the system

Topic	Rationale
<p>Complaints oversight: Establishing and embedding our ongoing monitoring of the Commonwealth's complaints management process across aged care</p>	<p>Oversight of the Commonwealth's complaints management processes across the aged care system is a key object of the IGAC Act.</p> <p>Complaints oversight will provide the Office with ongoing intelligence and will also support transparent and accountable reporting on the effectiveness of complaints management processes. The Office will seek to identify relevant data sources required to inform and embed this capability, including drawing upon the work we will undertake at '3.3' above, in relation to delivering a rights-focussed complaints system.</p>
<p>Oversight and analysis of the operation of the Serious Incident Response Scheme (SIRS)</p>	<p>As part of the Memorandum of Understanding with the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (ACQSC), the Office receives regular data on SIRS reported by providers.</p> <p>The Office uses this data to inform its ongoing oversight of the administration and regulation of aged care, including developing a deep understanding of the main areas where SIRS are being reported as well as looking for systemic patterns and emerging issues in the data. The Office will continue to examine this data to measure the effectiveness of actions undertaken to address SIRS at the systemic level, and whether the Scheme provides an appropriate mechanism for compliance and improvement in the provision of aged care is also a key focus for this oversight function.</p>

5.Looking forward

The following issues were identified by both the Office and stakeholders as critical to realising the Statement of Rights codified in the new *Aged Care Act 2024*. Although these issues have not been slated for formal examination in 2025–26 the Inspector-General will maintain a keen interest in their development, with a view to their subsequent commencement as ‘projects’ (as distinct from issues that are simply ‘monitored’) by the Office beyond 2025–26.

5.1 Human rights

Topic	Rationale
Embedding human rights in aged care	The new Act provides little in the way of mechanisms to both enforce the Statement of Rights or embed it through the way the aged care system is administered. The Office intends to look at methods beyond the legislation that can build human rights centred behaviour into the aged care system in a manner that does not solely rely on raising a breach, in addition to how individual breaches can be remedied beyond simply making a ‘complaint’. The intent is to determine how the Statement of Rights can be both embedded and enforced to ensure the system truly provides the correct policy settings to bring rights in aged care to life.
What does trauma-aware and healing-informed aged care look like?	Trauma-aware, healing-informed aged care is a right of every person who receives aged care under the new Aged Care Act 2024. The Office intends to examine and give strong guidance on how trauma-aware, healing-informed care could be brought to life through the government’s administration and regulation of the aged care system.

5.2 An equitable and sustainable aged care system

Topic	Rationale
Co-payments: are they breaching human rights?	Pending the availability of relevant data and feedback the Office will consider whether the consequences of the implementation and structure of the co-payments system for Support at Home warrants a report or review.

Topic	Rationale
The disparity between the NDIS and aged care	The Office is interested in further investigating the impact on older people with disability when they move from specialised disability support into aged care.

5.3 Reliable safeguarding and oversight of the system

Topic	Rationale
The merits of a Community Visitor Program	<p>The Inspector-General is aware of the importance and impact community visitors play in the disability, prisons, mental health and other sectors in operating as the independent eyes and ears of a system's adherence to human rights.</p> <p>This Office is interested in exploring the merits of a similar scheme, focussed on independent oversight rather than companionship, in aged care.</p>

6. Conclusion

The Inspector-General has a statutory responsibility to oversee the Australian Government's administration, regulation and funding of aged care. The 2025–26 Annual Work Plan provides a balance between accountability and transparency and sets out our intention to drive continuous improvement in the aged care system for older people in Australia.

This work plan is ambitious, but the Office is committed to ensuring that Australia provides an aged care system that upholds the rights of older people and that delivers high quality care as aspired to in the new *Aged Care Act 2024*.



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