

# Submission to Inspector-General of Aged Care: 2025 Progress Report on Implementation of Aged Care Royal Commission Recommendations

## Southern Cross Care Queensland

### About Southern Cross Care Queensland

Southern Cross Care Queensland (SCCQ) is a large not-for-profit Catholic organisation established by the Knights of the Southern Cross. SCCQ has been helping older Australians for over 40 years, with a strong focus on supporting and serving regional, rural and remote communities.

Southern Cross Care Qld has grown to employ over 1,000 staff who provide services for more than 2,000 people. Our network includes thirteen aged care facilities, five retirement villages, and home care services across Queensland.

In addition to this, SCCQ is also supporting Southern Cross Broken Hill (SCCBH) with some quality and financial issues. SCCBH and SCCQ have entered into a Heads of Agreement this is in place to facilitate the transition of services to SCCQ on 1 July 2025, subject to the remediation of quality issues and securing ongoing support from the Commonwealth to facilitate the establishment of sustainable operations and upgrading of Broken Hill's aged care capital infrastructure.

### Reflections on progress

SCCQ acknowledges the significant work that was undertaken to progress the Aged Care Act 2024 reforms. This reform and legislation, which embraces a more human-centered approach to aged care, supporting those receiving and delivering care and demonstrates the government's commitment to justice and fairness for all older Australians.

There has also been positive work done in better recognising the staff who make this possible. This includes an important recognition of the role of nurses and aged care workers through the wage increase. This bold step has made a real difference in acknowledging the value of our workforce.

We firmly believe that working together - community providers, the government and our regulatory body, the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission - plays a crucial role in guiding and governing the delivery of quality care to all older Australians and is ensuring that aged care services remain a priority in rural and remote communities.

### Priorities in reform

SCCQ's overarching position and priority in the ongoing reforms in aged care, is ensuring that the future system sets rural and remote providers up for success. This requires a fundamental acknowledgement of the unique position of those providers. While rural and remote providers may share similar challenges with colleagues in metropolitan areas, more often than not, our issues are compounded and therefore need particular attention.

The reality of aged care service in rural and remote areas is provision that carries significantly higher delivery costs (as compared to metropolitan areas) and critical challenges related to attracting and maintaining a professional workforce directly, and having accessible supporting care structures.

Rural and remote aged care providers must meet these challenges, along with increased burden of reporting requirements from regulators.

As more individuals are empowered to stay at home for longer, then aged care infrastructure and services also need to reflect the growing and changing needs of ageing populations outside of metropolitan and regional centres.

It is important that future funding models reflect these realities and adapt accordingly to ensure that rural and remote aged care providers can continue to operate sustainably. Providers must also acknowledge the need to innovate and look for solutions to collaborate and build more efficiency into our operating management services through technology and other solutions to make it viable for all stakeholders.

### *Addressing workforce shortages*

Workforce challenges in aged care are vast. There are shortages of qualified workers across the country, which means there are even greater challenges attracting staff to rural or remote locations. There is a clear need to create incentives for individuals to join the aged care workforce, and the need outside is higher outside of metropolitan areas. This requires the establishment of both new and alternative ways to recruit and, importantly, retain staff.

There have been historically few incentives or recognition of the value aged care workers provide. The Royal Commission, and the negative perceptions that have surrounded the sector since then, have also proven challenging to overcome. This is not an issue which aged care as a sector can tackle alone, as it is both a reputation and a pipeline problem. However aged care settings represent an opportunity to test and explore new training avenues in communities and areas of need.

Government [data](#) has projected worker shortages are projected to increase to around 285,000 people by 2049-50, primarily for aged and disabled carers, nursing support and personal care workers.

The Department of Health and Aged Care identifies that more than one in three older Australians live in regional, rural or remote communities. The more remote the location, the less likely older people are to access aged care, and despite that fact that older people make up a greater part of the population in rural communities, they have far less access to aged care services than their counterparts in cities.

SCCQ has experienced a range of workforce challenges in our operations, and has successfully utilised supportive programs such as the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme. Our priority however is establishing long-term, sustainable workforce pipelines in our local areas.

As such we have invested in the implementation of an alternative pathway to facilitate establishing a local workforce.

## **Case study: Chinchilla Education and Training Hub**

SCCQ has established a dedicated education and training hub with Southern Queensland Rural Health (SQRH) in Chinchilla at its Illoura Village aged care home.

SQRH is a collaboration between The University of Queensland, University of Southern Queensland, Darling Downs Health and South West Hospital and Health Service, established to increase rural health education and training opportunities for nursing, midwifery and allied health students and health professionals in regional, rural, and remote communities across Southern Queensland.

The Chinchilla training facility will facilitate the provide high quality rural clinical placement opportunities with an aged care focus, for nursing and allied health students within the Western Downs region including student nurses, dieticians, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, psychologists, social workers and exercise physiologists.

This will jointly enhance the student learning experience as well as provide high quality health service provision of Illoura Village residents. It is also expected to help facilitate an increased interest in remaining in such rural and remote settings longer term for the students.

The facilities have also been upgraded, with training mannequins, an outdoor education space and a training room to complement the practical training students will receive working with residents.

### *Investing in models of care*

Investment in new, innovative or collaborative models of care can represent a strong path forward for rural and remote providers, representing opportunities to overcome a number of challenges in the care economy in one solution.

SCCQ is supportive of a hub-and-spoke model approach to care delivery in rural and remote areas, as a solution which can provide high quality facilities with reliable access to care. In SCCQ's Chinchilla location, one such facility has recently launched. This capitalises on scarce resources and increasing access to allied health professionals not only for aged care recipients but all community members.

Coupled with the training facilities outlined above, SCCQ is an advocate for reform which considers whole of individual health and wellbeing to ensure that aged care focuses on quality of life for those engaged with it.

A hub and spoke model also supports government objectives that support older Australians to remain at home for longer, with the necessary support structures in place through, for example local availability of Support at Home or other care services including respite. By expanding the availability of these hubs, we will collectively build a system that works – rather than focusing on aged care homes or programs that work. This collective energy is necessary to action change, and ultimately see the transformative intent of the Commissioner's recommendations coming to fruition.

## **Conclusion**

While momentum is positive, the reform program can do more to continue to prioritise stronger delivery in rural and remote locations, to ensure that there is equitable access to high quality aged care is a reality for all Australians, regardless of where they are based.

Southern Cross Care Queensland is committed to the future of aged care in its communities, which need to secure appropriate support, investment and appropriate consideration in reform implementation to ensure their long-term sustainability.

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