



Australian Government



OFFICE OF THE
INSPECTOR-
GENERAL
OF AGED CARE

Annual Work Plan

2026-27



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

© Commonwealth of Australia 2026

This work is copyright. Apart from any use permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part may be reproduced by any process without prior written permission from the Office of the Inspector-General of Aged Care.

Produced by the Office of the Inspector-General of Aged Care, Barton, Canberra, ACT.

Requests and enquiries concerning the contents of the report should be addressed to:

Office of the Inspector-General of Aged Care
PO Box 350
WODEN ACT 2606

Foreword



This Annual Work Plan sets out how the Office of the Inspector-General of Aged Care will fulfil its statutory responsibility to provide independent oversight of the Australian Government’s administration, funding and regulation of aged care. In a period of significant reform, including the implementation of the *Aged Care Act 2024*, our role is both clear and consequential: to monitor, to investigate, and to report to Parliament on whether the system is delivering on its promise to older people.

The work outlined here is grounded in a simple but demanding proposition: that aged care must uphold the rights, dignity and humanity of every older person. Our overarching focus remains moving the system from aspiration to action: ensuring the principles of human rights, person-centred care and high-quality care are not only articulated in legislation, but realised in practice. We will continue to examine whether funding, policy and administrative settings across complaints, restrictive practices, and access to supports are genuinely aligned to that vision. Where they are not, we will call that out, while simultaneously offering practical solutions.

In 2026-27, our priority is to hold the Australian Government to account for the effective implementation of reform. This includes commencing our review of the implementation of the Aged Care Royal Commission recommendations, as well as advancing work on a human rights-focused complaints system, reducing and eliminating restrictive practices, and assessing the case for greater investment in preventive and early-intervention supports. These are not abstract policy questions; they go directly to whether older people experience safety, choice and dignity in their care.

This work plan has been informed by deep engagement with people with lived experience, advocates, providers and governments. It reflects what we have heard through consultation, including the importance of listening with care and acting with purpose. It is also shaped by a clear understanding of where this Office can add the greatest value.

This agenda is ambitious, and it must be. The opportunity presented by reform is significant, but so too is the risk that change falls short without sustained scrutiny and accountability. Our commitment is to approach this work with independence, rigour and clarity, and always with the interests and rights of older people at the centre.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Natalie Siegel-Brown'. The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

Natalie Siegel-Brown

Inspector-General of Aged Care

Table of contents

Foreword	2
Section 1: Introduction	4
The role of the Inspector General	4
About the Annual Work Plan.....	5
Section 2: Key projects in 2026-27	6
2026-27 priority: From action to impact.....	6
How we decided our key focus topics.....	7
Section 3: Update on focused oversight projects.....	10
Human rights.....	10
An equitable and sustainable aged care system	11
Reliable safeguarding and oversight of the system.....	12
Section 4: Update on monitoring activities	13
An equitable and sustainable aged care system	13
Reliable safeguarding and oversight of the system.....	13
Section 5: Update on ‘looking forward’ projects.....	14

Section 1: Introduction

The role of the Inspector General

The Inspector-General of Aged Care's statutory functions are set out in the [*Inspector-General of Aged Care Act 2023*](#) (IGAC Act).

The Inspector-General broadly is responsible for:

- monitoring, investigating and reporting to the Minister and Parliament on:
 - the exercise of powers, and the performance of functions and duties, under an aged care law; or
 - the Commonwealth's administration of an aged care law or aged care funding agreement; or
 - the operation of an aged care law; or
 - the performance of obligations and the exercise of rights by the Commonwealth under an aged care funding agreement
- monitoring, investigating and reporting to the Minister and Parliament on systemic issues relating to a matter referred to above
- monitoring, investigating and reporting to the Minister and Parliament on any systems established by the Commonwealth to administer an aged care law or aged care funding agreement
- monitoring, investigating and reporting to the Minister and Parliament on the implementation by the Commonwealth of the recommendations of the Aged Care Royal Commission
- any other functions conferred on the Inspector-General by the IGAC Act or the regulations
- doing anything incidental to, or conducive to, the performance of the above functions.

About the Annual Work Plan

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 financial year, including any reviews 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 in Figure 1) which sets out how the Office of the Inspector-General (the Office) will deliver on its legislative functions, including the rationale for what should fall in, and outside of our work.

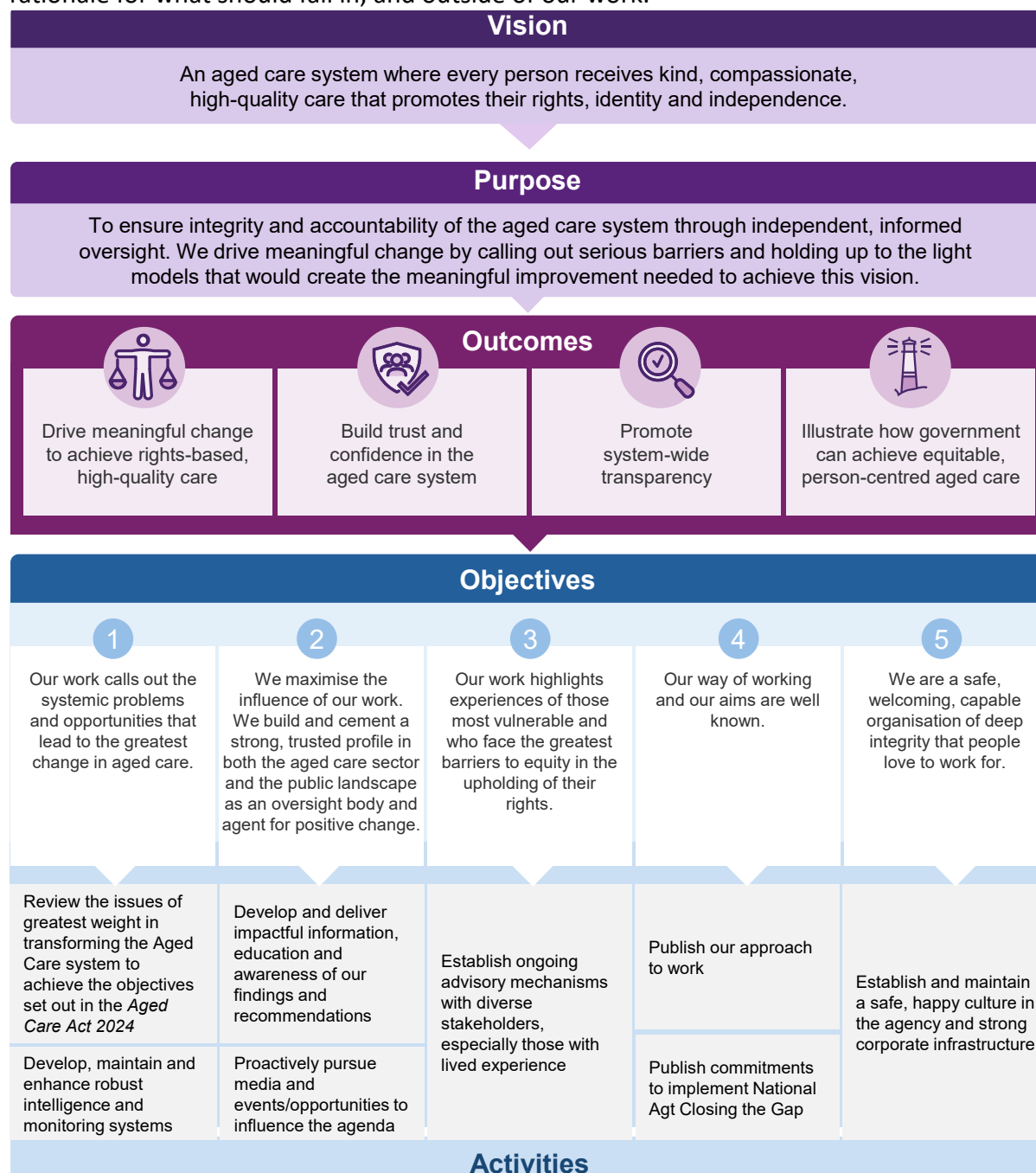


Figure 1: Office of the Inspector-General of Aged Care Strategic Framework

This work plan reflects the status of work undertaken during 2025–26. It also sets out the priorities for 2026–27 in monitoring, investigating and reporting to Parliament on the government’s administration, funding and regulation of the aged care system.

Section 2: Key projects in 2026-27

2026-27 priority: From action to impact

The core role of the Inspector-General is established in statute: to hold the Australian Government to account for the administration, funding and regulation of aged care through independent monitoring, investigation and reporting to Parliament. This responsibility does not change from year to year. What evolves is how we focus that responsibility to ensure our oversight is directed to the areas of greatest consequence for older people, and most capable of driving meaningful system improvement.

In 2025–26, our work was guided by the theme ‘From aspiration to action: Realising human rights and person-centred care in aged care’. That work reflected a system in transition, where the principles of the new *Aged Care Act 2024* (Aged Care Act) were being defined and embedded. In 2026-27, we move to the next stage: testing whether those commitments are translating into real-world impact for older people and, where they are not, identifying change needed.

This year, we are sharpening our oversight to focus on how reform is being implemented in practice, and whether it is delivering on its intended outcomes. This includes examining key system components, such as complaints processes, the regulation and use of restrictive practices, access to preventive supports, and testing whether the aged care budget’s administration advances or impedes the rights delivered under the Aged Care Act and the recommendations of the Aged Care Royal Commission. It also includes our legislated 2027 Review of the implementation of the Aged Care Royal Commission recommendations as a central mechanism for assessing system performance.

Importantly, our role is not only to identify where the system falls short, but to contribute to how it can be strengthened. In doing so, we aim to support both accountability and reform, ensuring oversight contributes to better outcomes, not simply better diagnosis.

Through this approach, we are moving beyond establishing what should occur, to rigorously assessing what is occurring – and what must change to ensure the system delivers safe, high-quality and rights-based care for all older people.

The key projects we will undertake or commence this year to address this priority are:

- **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 November 2027 (as set out in the *Aged Care and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2025*).

During 2026-27, we will commence work toward delivering a report on the Review of the Implementation of Aged Care Royal Commission recommendations.

- **Restrictive practices**

As discussed on [page 10](#), we will undertake a consultative process that will examine the current state of restrictive practices in aged care and the pathway for Government to pursue reduction and elimination. The findings from this process will also inform our future areas of focus in relation to restrictive practices.

- **Preventive approach to aged care**

As discussed on [page 11](#), we will continue to examine whether greater investment in early-intervention and preventive aged care supports can reduce downstream demand for higher cost, more intensive aged care services, while improving outcomes for older people in Australia. Evidence suggests that delaying residential aged care entry, even modestly, can generate substantial system-wide savings. The project will apply theoretical economic evaluation methodologies to assess the effectiveness, efficiency and value for money of current aged care policy settings in supporting ageing at home.

- **Measuring a human rights-focused, person-centred complaints system**

As discussed on [page 12](#), in order to assess whether the current complaints system is both person-centred and rights focused, we will identify the key indicators of a best practice complaints framework and explore what a rights-based system should mean for older people and their carers. This will explore not just the mechanics of the current system but whether the law, regulation and policy enables achievement of these benchmarks

How we decided our key focus topics

A range of factors were considered when developing the 2026-27 work program, including:

- the statutory role of the Inspector-General
- the Inspector-General's Strategic Framework
- feedback and insights from community groups and stakeholders
- projects and activities currently underway
- previous monitoring and oversight findings.

This work plan responds to current expectations and emerging risks and opportunities for improved accountability and transparency in the aged care system.

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

In determining the focus topics for our work, in 2025 the Inspector-General sought input from across the aged care sector, emphasising the voices of people with lived experience of the aged care system. 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 process of identifying topics included considering:

- issues and concerns consistently raised by stakeholders through our 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
- the availability of relevant data to deliver definitive conclusions and effective recommendations
- resources available within the Office to undertake the work
- the Inspector-General's views regarding the areas in which the Office can best support true and effective transformational change.

The list of issues identified through stakeholder engagement was synthesised and subsequently re-tested with staff and a targeted group of stakeholders to confirm and prioritise the most critical issues for progression in 2025-26.

These issues remain highly relevant and of continued importance to stakeholders in 2026-27, as the new Aged Care Act is embedded across the aged care system.

Work continues to progress on the following 5 key areas identified last financial year:

1. How can the full definition of high-quality care be achieved? How is it done elsewhere?
2. Restrictive practices: What is needed for true reduction and elimination?
3. A preventative approach to needing acute care (a public health/economy-wide approach to aged care).
4. An approach to co-designing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged care (co-led with the First Nations Aged Care Commissioner).
5. What does a human rights-focused, person-centred complaints system look like?

These focus areas are shaded in pink and marked with an asterisk (*) in Figure 2, and an update on each is addressed in [Section 3: 'Update on oversight projects.](#)

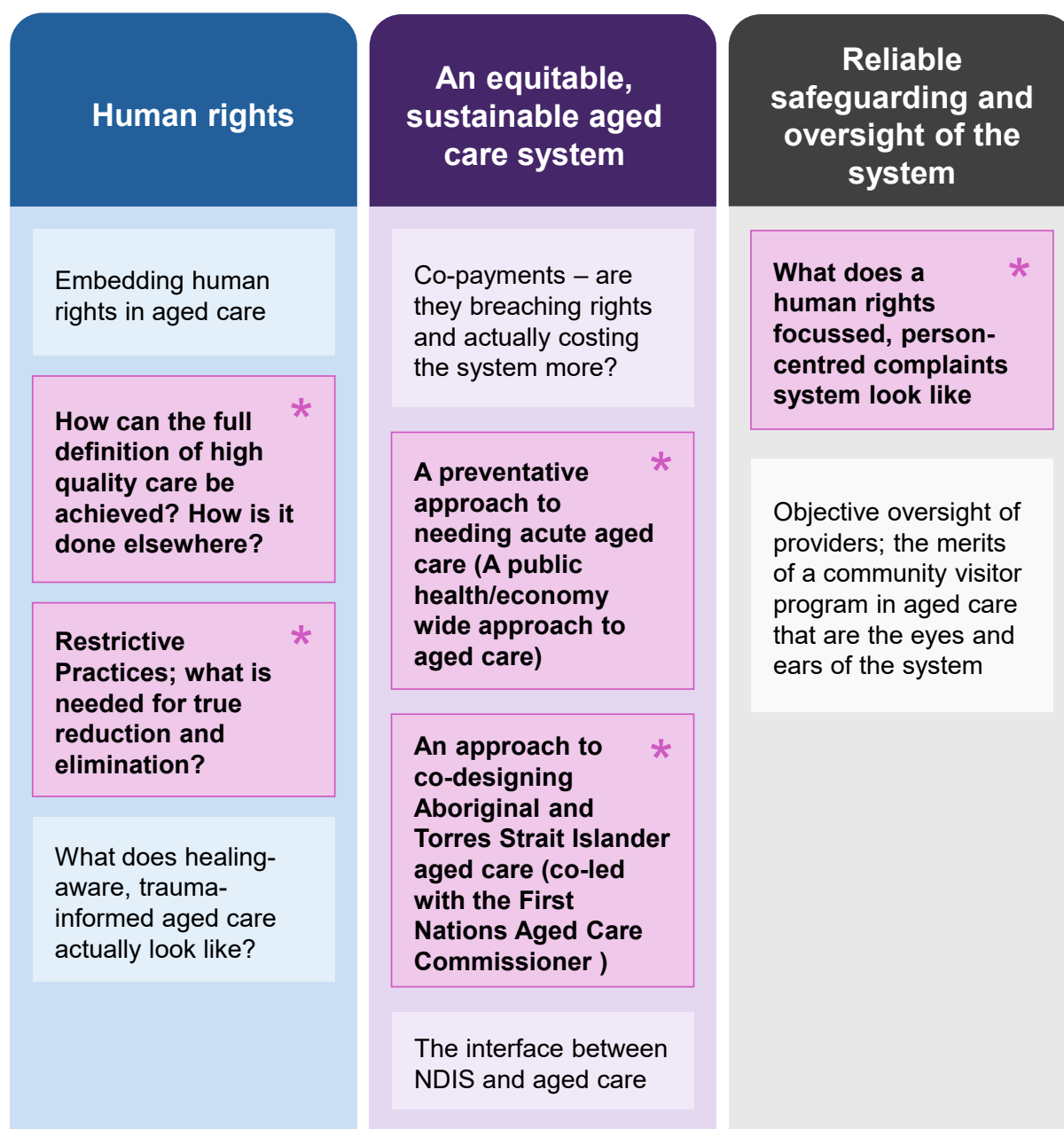


Figure 2: Five chosen focus areas for in the 2025–26 and 2026-27 Annual Work Plans

Section 3: Update on focused oversight projects

In line with the Inspector-General's ambition to see the rights-based, person-centred, high-quality care codified by the new Aged Care Act realised, the theme for our oversight activities in 2025-26 was 'From aspiration to action: Realising human rights and person-centred care in aged care'. This theme remains the Inspector-General's overarching ambition, and so will be carried across into the work undertaken in 2026-27.

All activities have been informed by our legislative functions under section 10 of the IGAC Act and fulfil our objectives under section 3 of the IGAC Act.

Below is an update on progress to date, and work underway, on each of the 5 identified focus areas.

Human rights

- **Focus topic: How can the full definition of high-quality care be achieved?**

In 2025-26, we undertook an initial gap analysis and mapping exercise. This exercise compared the legislated definition of 'high-quality care' against the ways in which care is conceptualised and measured within the current regulatory mechanisms administered by Commonwealth agencies, as well as a smaller number of measurement tools developed by academics and advocates. The aim of the exercise was to determine whether the existing regulatory framework was fit-for-purpose in fully assessing the quality of care provided in line with the legislated definition.

We subsequently engaged with the Australian Consortium for Aged Care (ACAC) to review and provide input to their draft *National Framework for High Quality Person-Centred Care*, which provides a cross-setting, evidence-based framework to monitor the quality and safety of health and aged care services provided to older people in Australia. The development of the framework reflects the efforts of 59 collaborators across academia, advocacy, government and service delivery over several years.

Our input sought to highlight an opportunity to harmonise the draft framework with the legislated definition of high-quality care in the Aged Care Act and the existing regulatory settings. This aimed to further legitimise the framework by anchoring it in the legislated objective of delivering high-quality care and the regulations against which providers and governments will be held accountable.

We anticipate the final framework will be released in the coming months.

- **Focus area: Restrictive practices - What is needed for true reduction and elimination?**

The intention of this work is not to argue the point that the government should pursue a pathway to reduce and eliminate restrictive practices in aged care, akin to that already in place in other sectors. Our Office considers this is a principle already well established by the Aged Care Royal Commission. Rather, the purpose is to set out the way in which the government should achieve this.

We have commenced discussions with the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing and the Aged Care Safety and Quality Commission (the Commission) to clarify

the intent and application of the regulatory framework for restrictive practices and each agency's roles and responsibilities under the new Aged Care Act and supporting Rules.

Points of discussion covered existing policy governing the use of restrictive practices in aged care settings; the scope of the Commission's regulatory role; monitoring, compliance and enforcement; and support for provider compliance.

We have also held 'preliminary discussions' with an extensive range of stakeholders, and delivered a presentation to the Community of Practice collaborative initiative between Queensland Health System Policy Branch and Caxton Community Legal Centre Inc. Discussions to date have helped build our understanding and assisted with determining the most impactful way to proceed.

Our intention is to pursue two further streams of consultations. The first will be 1:1 sessions with invited participants, primarily experts with knowledge of the application of, and legal frameworks surrounding, restrictive practices. The second will be a series of consultative forums with providers, non-government organisations, people with lived experience of restrictive practices, people who have experienced institutional trauma, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and other subject matter experts.

The information we gather will assist us to finalise our work program on restrictive practices and inform material for public release.

An equitable and sustainable aged care system

- **Focus topic: A preventive approach to aged care – a preventive health/economy wide approach**

We have commenced an [economic analysis project](#) which seeks to examine whether greater investment in preventive aged care services and supports can reduce downstream demand for higher-cost and more intensive forms of aged care, such as residential care, enabling the overall aged care budget to support more people sooner.

In 2025-26, we undertook an in-depth environmental scan and detailed planning processes to determine the overarching project direction and scope. As a result, we reframed this project – which was initially proposed to encompass a broader, economy wide approach – to instead focus solely on examining how the existing aged care budget could service more people, more quickly through investment in early intervention and prevention. Additionally, the project seeks to examine whether the current in-home support policy settings may be perversely impacting access to preventive supports – leading to premature entry into more costly forms of aged care.

The first part of the economic modelling and analysis component of this project is expected to be finalised in 2026-27.

- **Focus topic: Approach to co-designing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged care**

We have been working closely with the office of the Interim First Nations Aged Care Commissioner to design a thoughtful and culturally appropriate way of progressing this project. Several 'brainstorming' sessions have been held between the two offices and a proposed approach developed, which focuses on collectively developing a framework, or set of practical principles, that illustrate how to 'do' co-design well in the context of aged care.

Substantial work has been done on co-design by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, including the Lowijta Institute. We will acknowledge and aim to build upon these solid foundations.

Following the Interim First Nations Aged Care Commissioner's resignation, we will reconsider how to take this work forward.

We remain committed to the project and, before we settle on the goal of this piece of work, intend to test our thinking and canvass the proposed approach with a broad range of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations involved in the provision of aged care services, key community members, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders with lived experience of aged care.

Our intention is to work closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and broader community to test, develop, and consult on the concrete actions government must take to embark on co-designing a First Nations Aged Care pathway, in line with the Aged Care Royal Commission recommendations that were accepted by government, and the first priority reform under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap: Shared decision-making. We will strive to model good practice in shared decision-making and co-design in approaching this work.

Reliable safeguarding and oversight of the system

- **Focus topic: What does a human rights-focused and person-centred complaints system look like?**

A desktop review of national and international complaints systems across a range of service settings was undertaken in 2025-26 to identify the key features of best practice human rights-focused and person-centred complaints systems. A short paper based on the findings of this research will support further stakeholder discussion and consultation.

In addition, we commenced discussions with the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (the Commission), which oversees aged care providers' complaints handling systems, to gain an in-depth understanding of the changes to the complaints system enacted under the new Aged Care Act, as well as how current complaints processes are operating in practice. Planning is underway for similar discussions with relevant agencies that have responsibility for additional aged care complaints systems, including the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, My Aged Care and Services Australia.

Under the next stage of this project, we intend to undertake further stakeholder engagement and develop an overarching framework to support the Inspector-General's oversight of the Commonwealth's administration of complaints management processes across the aged care system.

Section 4: Update on monitoring activities

An equitable and sustainable aged care system

Topic areas:

- **The introduction of co-payments for Support at Home: Impacts on rights and potential unintended consequences.**
- **Waitlist timeframes for assessment and access to aged care**
- **The interface between the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and aged care**

In 2026-27, we will deliver a submission for the Senate Community Affairs References Committee inquiry into the Support at Home program. This submission will include an examination of the impact of co-payments on program recipients, including people in receipt of the Aged Pension, people from different geographic areas and those from particular community groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Reliable safeguarding and oversight of the system

- **Complaints oversight: Establishing and embedding our ongoing monitoring of the Commonwealth's complaints management process across aged care**

The establishment of our oversight function will be further informed by the findings of the concurrent 'Human rights-focused and person-centred complaints system' work plan project.

- **Oversight and analysis of the operation of the Serious Incident Response Scheme (SIRS)**

Several meetings have been held with the Commission regarding understanding how the SIRS data is collected and reported. This data is available publicly through the Commission's Sector Performance Report. We will monitor the sector average over time and continue to liaise with the Commission and interrogate data more deeply.

Section 5: Update on ‘looking forward’ projects

The following issues were identified in the ‘Looking forward’ section of our [2025-26 Annual Work Plan](#):

- Embedding human rights in aged care
- What does trauma-aware and healing-informed aged care look like?
- Co-payments: Are they breaching human rights?
- The disparity between the NDIS and aged care
- The merits of a Community Visitor Program.

While these issues remain critically important, in the current fiscally-constrained operating environment, the Inspector-General and the Office is compelled to prioritise particular areas of focus.

Notwithstanding this, the Inspector-General regularly raises these issues in stakeholder interactions across the country, and insights from those discussions will inform future input into this work.



Australian Government



OFFICE OF THE
INSPECTOR-
GENERAL
OF AGED CARE

igac.gov.au