

Joint Communiqué – Ministerial Seniors Roundtable

Ministers responsible for seniors met on 28 May 2020 to discuss the impacts of social isolation and loneliness amongst seniors, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. We recognise that this is a challenging time for all in our country, particularly for older Australians.

The discussions we had today were very constructive, highlighting some of the work underway across jurisdictions to address key issues currently facing older Australians. We recognise the enormous contribution that older Australians make to their communities, and discussed a range of mechanisms to engage older Australians in the COVID-19 response and recovery phases.

Ministers shared ideas on how governments across the country can assist in addressing the issues of social isolation, loneliness and elder abuse. This included working with the community and legal sectors, provision of information and grants, and the sharing of resources across jurisdictions.

We acknowledge that social isolation was a key issue for many older Australians pre-COVID, and that the issue is now even more pressing in light of the self-isolation and other health directives put in place to address COVID-19. Having said this, we also acknowledge the contributions of older Australians in volunteering and community leadership pre-COVID-19. Supporting older people to re-engage with these opportunities, once it is safe to do so, will not only be beneficial for their own mental health and wellbeing, but will also provide benefits for the broader community.

We pay tribute to the many members of the community who have stepped in to provide services to older people and other community members throughout the response phase.

The pandemic has highlighted the valuable role community organisations play, particularly their ability to mobilise supports for vulnerable members of the community. Traditional practices of engagement have been strongly challenged during the pandemic, and government and non-government services need to continue to flexibly adapt their service models.

We are aware that unfortunately COVID-19 has heightened the risk of older people experiencing elder abuse, particularly financial abuse. Considerable work on elder abuse awareness and prevention is occurring at both the Commonwealth and state and territory levels, and we remain committed to pursuing this work through inter-jurisdictional collaboration.

Discussion also noted the ongoing need to monitor the impact of visiting guidelines in residential aged care, noting that maintaining contact between families and their loved ones who are being cared for in such facilities is a pressing concern for many Australian families. We also recognise that this is particularly important for members of the culturally and linguistically diverse community.

This Roundtable has helped us to work towards achieving this collaborative approach.

We agreed to continue these roundtable meetings on a six-monthly basis to help us establish an ongoing intergovernmental mechanism to address issues affecting seniors across Australia which do not readily fall within the responsibility of another ministerial forum or council.

Federal Minister for Aged Care and Senior Australians, Senator the Hon. Richard Colbeck; ACT Minister for Seniors and Veterans, Mr Gordon Ramsay MLA; Ms Alexandra Tooth, Senior Adviser and proxy for the NSW Acting Minister for Seniors and Veterans, the Hon. Dr. Geoffrey Lee MP; Victorian Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, the Hon. Luke Donnellan MP; WA Minister for Seniors and Ageing, the Hon. Mick Murray MP; SA Minister for Health and Wellbeing, the Hon. Stephen Wade MLC; QLD Minister for Disability Services and Seniors, the Hon. Coralee O'Rourke MP; attended the Roundtable.
