

Introduction

The Committee for Sydney welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Delivering Quality Care More Efficiently inquiry.

We strongly support the direction of the Commission's interim report, which rightly emphasises regulatory alignment, collaborative commissioning, and investment in prevention. These are essential building blocks of a high-quality and sustainable care system.

Our forthcoming research report, Raising Sydney's Care Factor (to be released October 2025), brings together the perspectives of more than 50 organisations across health, housing, transport, unions, universities, business and community services. It demonstrates that Sydney's productivity, prosperity and fairness are directly linked to how we value and sustain care.

Our research highlights additional considerations that are not reflected in the interim report, but which are crucial to delivering quality care efficiently - particularly in Australia's major cities where housing costs, transport access and workforce shortages are most acute.

Additional Considerations

More affordable housing for care workers

- **Housing affordability crisis:** SGS Economics' Rental Affordability Index shows that on average incomes, care workers cannot afford to rent anywhere in Sydney. This is already leading to service withdrawal - for example, service providers exiting home care in high-cost areas such as the Northern Beaches due to an inability to attract staff.
- **Policy response:** Affordable and secure housing supply for essential care workers should be embedded in housing strategies and precinct planning. Mechanisms could include: consistent inclusionary zoning and contributions frameworks; build-to-rent and community housing partnerships targeted at the care workforce; and essential worker housing targets around hospital and health precincts.

Increased transport access and safety

- **Transport as a workforce issue:** Care workers often travel to dispersed sites, at night or off-peak, when safe and affordable transport options are scarce. This increases costs, creates safety risks (particularly for women), and contributes to workforce attrition.

- **Policy response:** Expand transport subsidies to cover rideshare and on-demand services, not just taxis; design health precincts with dedicated rideshare/cargo-bike pick-up zones to reduce parking pressures and improve safety; embed transport accessibility into workforce planning and collaborative commissioning agreements.

More focus on workforce entry and retention

- **Training pipeline gaps:** Current pathways are inconsistent, with variable Certificate III quality and a “merry-go-round” of re-certification undermining workforce stability.
- **Financial barriers:** Mandatory placements often push students into poverty ('placement poverty'), deterring future entrants. Migrant and refugee workers also face complex, costly recognition processes that waste skills.
- **Policy response:** Create a Digital Care Passport — a single portable record of worker checks, qualifications and experience; provide living wages for students on placement; simplify and streamline skills recognition for migrants and refugees; recognise informal carers (grandparents, kinship carers, volunteers) with training and financial support; and establish clear career progression pathways across care sectors to improve retention.

Addressing the gendered nature of care

While the interim report rightly focuses on efficiency, it does not acknowledge the profoundly gendered nature of care. Women make up the overwhelming majority of the paid care workforce and carry the largest share of unpaid care in households. This drives significant lifetime income impacts, which in turn limit both equity and productivity.

Our forthcoming Raising Sydney's Care Factor report recommends a cultural shift that reframes care work as everyone's work. Public campaigns and education initiatives are needed to challenge stereotypes that position care as 'women's work' and to promote shared responsibility across genders. Embedding this approach into national reform will not only strengthen the workforce pipeline but also reduce structural gender inequalities in pay, participation and retirement outcomes.

Reframing Care

- **Problem: Care work undervalued as infrastructure.** Without changing perceptions, the sector will continue to face stigma and undervaluation.
- **Policy response:** Invest in public campaigns that reframe care as essential social and economic infrastructure and build community support for reform.

- **Case study:** Barcelona’s Caregiver Card, which formally recognises both paid and unpaid carers, reframing care as a civic contribution and essential infrastructure.

Supporting innovation and prevention

Innovation is essential to making care more efficient, resilient and person-centred. Too often, providers are forced to duplicate effort, pilots remain small-scale, and frontline staff lack the tools and data needed to deliver quality care. A coordinated, system-wide approach to embracing innovation in the care sector is needed.

Digital Training and Standards

- **Problem: Fragmented innovation and duplicated digital training.** When new legislation or regulations are introduced (such as the incoming Aged Care Act), providers are left to build their own digital training and compliance platforms. This duplication is costly, inefficient, and risks inconsistent implementation.
- **Policy response:** Establish a nationally supported digital training platform, embedded with AI-enabled tools to operationalise legislation and standards, saving providers time and money and ensuring consistency across the system.

Workforce Deployment and Efficiency

- **Problem: Administrative burden and inefficient workforce deployment.** Care workers spend significant time on manual rostering, travel, and duplicated tasks rather than direct care. This undermines both workforce satisfaction and efficiency.
- **Policy response:** Support services to adopt AI-enabled rostering and workforce distribution systems that reduce admin, cut travel times, and better match supply to demand.

Data and System Planning

- **Problem: Lack of real-time planning data.** Providers and families cannot plan effectively because information on package approvals and allocations is fragmented and delayed.
- **Policy response:** Develop a national real-time prevention and workforce dashboard, including predictive analytics to forecast workforce needs and align recruitment cycles.

Scaling Innovation

- **Problem: Pilots that do not scale.** Too often, successful innovations remain stuck at the pilot stage and are not embedded system-wide.

- **Policy response:** Establish a National Care Innovation Fund to scale programs with demonstrated impact; expand ARIIA; set up state-level innovation hubs linking providers, researchers and communities; and require open access to the results of publicly funded pilots.

Case studies from our research include:

- The Queensland Skills Passport pilot, which streamlined training recognition and improved workforce mobility.
- Anglicare Sydney’s advocacy for a national dashboard, enabling providers and families to plan proactively.
- Victoria’s Orange Door model, which reduces duplication and trauma through integrated, co-located services.
- The Coleambally Care Together Co-operative, a shared governance model that kept small rural providers operating.

Conclusion

The Productivity Commission has set a strong direction for reform. Our work highlights additional considerations that will make these reforms work in practice.

Our forthcoming report, Raising Sydney’s Care Factor, will be published in October 2025. It brings together the insights of more than 50 organisations across Sydney’s health, housing, transport, education, business and community sectors. The report sets out the scale of the care challenge, the economic and social risks of under-investment, and a suite of practical reforms across workforce, housing, transport and urban planning to ensure Sydney can meet the growing demand for care.

We would welcome the opportunity to brief the Commission further on this report and its recommendations once it is released. We believe our findings will complement the Commission’s work and provide a place-based lens on how care reforms can be delivered effectively in Australia’s largest city.

If you have any questions do not hesitate to contact Estelle Grech, Policy Manager at the Committee for Sydney [REDACTED].

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]

Eamon Waterford

CEO

The Committee for Sydney