



16 September 2019

Project Team
Evaluation of the Aged Care System Navigator Measure
Australian Healthcare Associates
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Dear Sir/Madam

Evaluation of the Aged Care System Navigator Measure

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Australian Healthcare Associates Discussion Paper: *Evaluation of the Aged Care System Navigator Measure*. We note this consultation seeks feedback from stakeholders regarding aged care system navigator models and system navigator models in other relevant sectors.

The ANMF is Australia's largest national union and professional nursing and midwifery organisation. In collaboration with the ANMF's eight state and territory branches, we represent the professional, industrial and political interests of more than 270,000 nurses, midwives and carers across the country.

Our members work in the public and private health, aged care and disability sectors across a wide variety of urban, rural and remote locations. We work with them to improve their ability to deliver safe and best practice care in each and every one of these settings, fulfil their professional goals and achieve a healthy work/life balance.

Our strong and growing membership and integrated role as both a professional and industrial organisation provide us with a complete understanding of all aspects of the nursing and midwifery professions and see us uniquely placed to defend and advance our professions.

Through our work with members we aim to strengthen the contribution of nursing and midwifery to improve Australia's health and aged care systems, and the health of our national and global communities.

With regard to care of older people, ANMF members work across all settings in which aged care is delivered, including approximately 40,000 members who are currently employed directly in the aged care sector. Many more of our members are involved in the provision of health care for older persons who move across sectors (acute, residential, community and in-home care), depending on their health needs. Being at the fore-front of aged care, and caring for older people over the twenty-four hour period in acute care and residential facilities, our members are in a prime position to make clear recommendations to improve the care provided and enhance processes for access to that care.

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ANMF considers that aged care should be viewed within the context of the wider health system, rather than in isolation. Health care (including clinical care) is a significant and increasing function of aged care, both in the community and residential settings. The current Royal Commission into Quality and Safety in Aged Care has clearly identified there is much to be done to raise this awareness and improve standards of care. The ANMF contends that standards of care must be consistent, irrespective of where these services are provided, within a person centred approach to care.

The ANMF has a strong commitment to improving care provision to older persons in residential and community aged care and partnering with them and their families. There is a widely accepted view that the aged care system is complex and often difficult to navigate for older Australians and those acting on their behalf. For older people applying for, or already accessing community based aged care, issues of queuing, unreasonable waiting times and a complicated My Aged Care system seem almost designed to frustrate, rather than facilitate access to services. For those requiring residential aged care, it is rarely a move that is planned in the longer term. Rather, it is often at relatively short notice, and with a degree of urgency due to a rapid decline in physical health, cognition or circumstances, or because appropriate levels of community based care are not available when needed.

System navigator models in general

While a range of advocacy services exist for those receiving aged care, it would be fair to say that demand outstrips supply. Any measure to assist older Australians to navigate the complex landscape of aged care services, to access services that best meet their needs, is welcomed.

Whichever navigator model is being employed the following are some general principles for inclusion:

- Education of the navigator workforce for their role, with particular attention to specific dementia education. Given the prevalence of dementia and proportion of people with dementia who would use any one of the navigator models, dementia education is essential.
- A person-centred approach to care planning, where the navigator works with the consumer and the family/carer to develop a care plan around their wishes and preferences and their changing needs. Nurses would be best placed to do this in a multi-disciplinary but consumer-focused way.
- An effective and ongoing awareness campaign to ensure people know, for example, what the navigator does, how they can be accessed, or what types of navigators there are to meet their needs. General practitioners and other health professionals need to be engaged in this campaign, as they may be the first point of contact for people with dementia.
- The delivery mode of the navigator needs to be appropriate for older people, especially those experiencing dementia. That is, the person needs to be able to access the navigator face-to-face, rather than an impersonal online portal or call centre which many older people and even their family/carers may struggle to use. The physical presence of the navigator would preferably be in the person's home as outreach support, or, available in physical hubs, where older Australians can get the help they need to engage productively with the aged care system.
- Regardless of geographical location, the older person and the family/carers should be able to access the relevant navigator in their local area. Funding therefore must be available to enable navigators to travel, allowing local access;
- The aged care navigator measures must be appropriately funded and resourced for the long term for viability and sustainability, and not seen as a good idea that is subsequently neglected in future budget cycles;



- There must be certainty of services for older Australians and the ANMF recommends that competitive tendering process must not be used. Rather provision of services directly by Commonwealth and state/territory Health Departments would provide certainty (much like Aged Care Assessment Teams) and not be subject to the pressures and potential conflict of interest of privately provided services;

Nurse navigator model of care

The navigator model that the ANMF is most familiar with is the nurse navigator model of care. These registered nurses, experienced in aged care, are educationally prepared to undertake holistic assessment of the person. They have an intimate understanding of the complex care needs of the older person, and have the knowledge to guide the elderly person and their family as they transition from home care to a full time care facility environment. Given that health care needs constitute a significant, and increasing, component of aged care, nurse navigators with the broad preparation and skill-set to address the biopsychosocial needs of older Australians are essential if these needs are to be adequately and appropriately met.

Internationally, nurse navigator positions have been employed in the United States since the early 1990's, with increasing use of this role over recent years to improve care coordination and navigation of the healthcare system and access to services.¹ In Australia, this model of care is used in varying ways across the states and territories to coordinate care and is referred to by various titles, including nurse navigator. In 2015, Queensland Health introduced 400 nurse navigator positions to ensure appropriate care and coordination of services along a patient's entire health care journey, helping them and their families/carers to navigate the healthcare system.² An evaluation is currently underway of the nurse navigator role within Queensland Health, with a report due later this year. This may be an informative document for the Australian Healthcare Associates evaluation process.

The advantages of registered nurse navigators, experienced in aged care, are outlined below:

- Nurse navigators understand the roles of the other members of the multi-disciplinary team and can effectively refer on to, and collaborate with, the most appropriate health care professional or non-clinical provider to meet clinical and non-clinical needs;
- They work closely in care teams with other health care professionals such as the older person's General Practitioner (with a shared high level of health literacy, thus improved messaging of the person's care needs) and with the wider multi-disciplinary team members;
- The assurance of a qualified and regulated health care practitioner who practices under the governance of the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Act (2009)* and a risk mitigating Professional Practice Framework which includes standards, codes and guidelines;
- The ability to formulate a comprehensive picture of the older person regarding all aspects of their physical and mental capabilities – the nurse navigator can assess the person's physical status and the nature of required health care relating to medicines, wound care, continence care, mobility supports, palliative care; and psycho social support;

¹ Hudson, A, et al., 2019, Qualitative insights of patients and carers under the care of nurse navigators, *Collegian*, 26(2019) 11-117 retrieved 3 September 2019 from [https://www.collegianjournal.com/article/S1322-7696\(18\)30049-0/pdf](https://www.collegianjournal.com/article/S1322-7696(18)30049-0/pdf)

² Queensland Health, 2015, Nurse Navigators, retrieved 3 September 2019 from <https://www.health.qld.gov.au/ocnmo/nursing/nurse-navigators>



- Nurse navigators present sound value for money. The further rural and remote you travel, nurses are the most prevalent qualified and regulated health practitioners available. They understand the unique challenges of rural and remote communities. It makes good economic and geographic sense, therefore, to use these health practitioners as the navigators for the aged care system. They are known and trusted by the local community, rather than bringing in a health professional or other worker who is unknown to the older person or their family/carers. This is especially important in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities where nurses have established trust relationships. In addition, in these settings the nurses work collaboratively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers and their health practitioner or health professional colleagues, to provide culturally appropriate aged care;
- They are well used to involving the person and their families/carers in understanding care needs, employing a person-centred approach to implementing care plans to ensure continuity of care when transitioning from home to a facility;
- Nurse navigators can assist the older person and their families/carers to prepare, and make informed decisions about, advance care plans;
- When issues arise outside of their scope of practice, the nurse navigator is able to assess when referral might be required to another navigator, such as to a financial navigator.

It is our view that the role of nurse navigator in aged care is ideally tailored to the scope of practice of registered nurses, due to the comprehensive nature of their assessment skills and knowledge of the aged care sector. Appropriate funding will be essential to ensure adequacy of staffing numbers to ensure the nurse navigator is able to take the time required to work with the older person and their family/carers. This funding should enable the nurse navigator to access the elderly person as part of the discharge team process in tertiary facilities or in primary care settings, such as general practices.

The ANMF appreciates the opportunity to participate in this consultation process and provide our feedback on behalf of our membership. We look forward to further assisting the ongoing process for the development of Aged Care System navigator models, especially registered nurse navigators, which will greatly improve the experience of older people whose care needs necessitate entry into the residential aged care service sector.

Should you require further information on our response, please contact Julianne Bryce, Senior Federal Professional Officer, ANMF Federal Office, Melbourne on 03 9602 8500 or jbryce@anmf.org.au.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lori-Anne Sharp'.

Lori-Anne Sharp
A/Federal Secretary
ANMF