

Mixed result for aged care budget



NOT ENOUGH: St Catherine's CEO Adrian Johnstone has welcomed certain aspects of the Federal Government's Budget for aged care, but believes more needs to be done. PHOTO: Kieren Tilly

By NICK SINIS

ALTHOUGH the Federal Government's budget for the aged care sector has been welcomed, some providers believe more needs to be done to fix ongoing issues plaguing the industry.

The budget has allocated \$29.3 billion for 2020-21, and increased funding will provide \$2 billion over four years for a variety of programs and initiatives.

It also includes \$746.3 million to address coronavirus through previously announced initiatives, and will cover the government's responses to the requirements of the Royal Commission's investigation.

Wangaratta's St Catherine's Hostel chief executive officer Adrian Johnstone said the sector needs significant transformation so senior Australians can get the quality they deserve.

"While the budget does not address all issues within the aged care system, it does lay a platform for the future," Mr Johnstone said.

"Many of the funding initiatives within the budget were previously announced in the July 2020 Economic and Fiscal Update.

"For residential care, it appears that any major initiatives will be included in the 2021 budget following the final report of the Royal Commission due February 2021."

Mr Johnstone said the promised 23,000 additional Homecare Packages (HCP), at a cost of \$1.6 billion over four years, appeared impressive but the devil was in the detail.

"Just 2000 of the 23,000 places offered are Level 4 assistance," he said.

"This is the highest level of care needed to keep people in their homes before entering residential care.

"The unprecedented investment is certainly welcomed, but highlights the fact that it is a problem that has long been unaddressed."

Wangaratta-based Indi Independent MP Helen Haines said the additional HCP were welcome but was too little, too late.

"We have known for years that the supply of HCP is critically low," Dr Haines said.

"The government's own figures show almost 30,000 people died in the past two years while waiting for a homecare package."

Allowances for additional aged care spending include:

- \$91.6 million assigned for reforming how residential aged care is funded;
- \$10.3 million to be invested in the Aged Care Workforce Council;
- \$10.8 million to ensure nurses are equipped to improve care and in particular, infection control in aged care as raised by the Royal Commission;
- \$11.3 million for the misuse of chemical and physical restraints for people living with dementia and to provide more specialist counselling teams; and
- \$29.8 million to support a Serious Incident Response Scheme to provide more staff to regulate the scheme, inspect services and provide safeguards for people in aged care.