



Senator the Hon Richard Colbeck
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TRANSCRIPT

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**ROYAL COMMISSION INTO AGED CARE
PRESS CONFERENCE**

RICHARD COLBECK:

Thanks everyone. Today we've seen the release of the Royal Commission into the aged care sector's interim report, and as the Prime Minister said when he announced the Royal Commission, that we needed to be prepared for some very, very difficult conversations, and to hear some very difficult things.

What we have been is shocked at the extent of what we've found. But importantly, what's happened is that this process has given senior Australians in particular a voice – an important voice in how they receive aged care and what might happen into the future. I said to industry last week, in anticipation of the report being released, that it would put us all on notice. It has certainly done that. It's done that in spades. It's put the government on notice, it's put the industry on notice, but I think as importantly as anything, it's put the entire community on notice.

It looks at the evolution of the aged care sector and the issues that sit within it in a generational and in an intergenerational sense, and the way that we treat and look after our older Australians. It challenges the intergenerational change in thinking and it challenges our generations. It also reinforces the need for government to continue the reforms that we've commenced since the Royal Commission was called last year. The new Aged Care Quality and Safety Commissioner, the new Quality Standards, new regulations on the use of restraint - and I'll come to a bit more about that in a moment - and increasing the number of aged care packages and access to aged care for senior Australians who want to age at home. It makes some very important recommendations in that sense as well.

So we've heard all these stories, we've heard too many of them. But it is, in my view, a necessary process because it gives me as Minister the imprimatur to drive reform and change through government, through industry, and importantly through the community. We need to have attitudinal change to the way that we interact, treat our older Australians. And I think it's important that we continue to work on that.

Happy to take questions.

JOURNALIST:

Is it also the case that it now urgently needs more funding, particularly when it says acting on the waiting list for home care packages is urgent?

RICHARD COLBECK:

In the context of home care packages, there's two things that I think need to occur. One is the way that the home care packages are delivered, and then of course there's the capacity of those in the market. But of course we've just put 25,000 new packages into the system over the year to July this year. So we are actually putting a lot more packages into the system. Since last year's Budget we've put \$2.2 billion to funding additional home care packages, and that number has increased from 60,000 when we came to government to 125 now, and projected to go out to 157,000. But there's- I think given that there's about \$600 million of funds that are tied up in packages that's not actually being utilised to provide care, there's also some reform of the system that's required and we'll start looking at that now.

JOURNALIST:

So what you're saying is there won't be more funding following this report? So home care packages urgent...

RICHARD COLBECK:

No, I'm saying- what I'm saying is that there are already more home care packages projected to come into the market. There needs to be some reform of the home care system in the way that it's delivered, and then obviously government's got some other considerations to make, because one of the three things that the Commission talked about as far as priorities was concerned was access to home care.

JOURNALIST:

What would be your first reform and when?

RICHARD COLBECK:

Well, we'll continue to do the work that we're doing. The Commission highlights three things. It highlights home care packages; it highlights regulations around restraint; and it highlights young people with disabilities in residential aged care. So they're three things that the Commission has said to us that we need to work on straight away. Obviously we have work afoot with respect to home care packages. We've already commenced work on the restraint process with new regulations that came into force on 1 July this year, and we continue to work with industry and other parties around that process, given that there's a Human Rights Committee report due to be tabled on that in the next few weeks. So those three things are the things that the Commission has asked us to focus on, and we'll work in those areas.

JOURNALIST:

Senator, can you explain a bit more how you will work on the home care packages? We know there are 120,000 people on the waitlist for Level 3 and 4 packages. Can you tell us a bit more about what you will do here? Because both senior groups and now the Royal Commission are saying what's happening at the moment is not enough, and people are actually dying while they're waiting to access these home care packages.

RICHARD COLBECK:

So as I said, we need to- I think we need to reform the way that they're delivered into the market, because there is considerable funds that's not being utilised in the delivery of care, and I'd rather see that money going to care delivery rather than sitting in funds as it is. And we need to continue to put more packages into the market. We've got some of that already projected, we'll have to look at that further.

JOURNALIST:

Will the Government take any urgent action on the third point which is young people in aged care?

RICHARD COLBECK:

I agree with the Commission that young people shouldn't be in aged care, so that goes back to the assessment process and I think that's something that we really can do something about quickly, and should.

JOURNALIST:

Minister what is your message to the Oakden whistle-blowers who without having come out and talked about the abuse, this Royal Commission wouldn't have happened?

RICHARD COLBECK:

Well, I thank them for that process. I congratulate them for that. But as I said at the outset one of the really important things that this Royal Commission has done is to give people a voice. As I said earlier, the Prime Minister warned us that we would hear some bad stories. What shocked us all has been the extent of that. And so that process, where a family who were concerned about the care that their loved one had received has precipitated not only the inquiry that was conducted into the Oakden facility but then this Aged Care Royal Commission, I think is really important because, as the report indicates, this is about the way that we treat older Australians as a nation. And so my comments about this report putting us all on notice, the government and governments over 20 or 30 years, the industry and also the community I think it sends a very, very important message.

JOURNALIST:

Just on the funding side again Minister, are you prepared to commit the government to putting additional funding into this sector given the report is quite clear that it is underfunded, it's not just about rejigging how these services are delivered. Are you prepared to commit to further funding before the final report of the Commission is handed down next year?

RICHARD COLBECK:

As I said what this report also does is give me as Minister the imprimatur to carry forward policy resolutions to improve the delivery of care. The Commission makes some significant recommendations - or not recommendations, but makes some comment about what's required in that space. I will use the imprimatur of the Royal Commission to carry all of those things forward with my colleagues.

JOURNALIST:

And Minister the report says this is urgent. How urgently will the Government be acting?

RICHARD COLBECK:

I will use the imprimatur of the Royal Commission report to carry the things forward that it says needs to be done with my colleagues.

JOURNALIST:

So we'd expect to see funding and in the MYEFO?

RICHARD COLBECK:

I will use the imprimatur of the report. You can be guaranteed of that.

JOURNALIST:

As Minister would you like to see funding in MYEFO? would you like to see that urgently?

RICHARD COLBECK:

Well I think I've answered your question.

JOURNALIST:

Not really. Would you like to see money by...

RICHARD COLBECK:

Well I will use the imprimatur of the Royal Commission report which I think lays it out for everybody what's required and I'll be doing that with my colleagues as part of the government process.

JOURNALIST:

Minister you talked a lot about what the Government's already doing and what's in train. Are you actually going to change anything the Government is doing in the aged care space as a result of this report today? You said it's put everyone on notice but are you actually going to change anything or reprioritise anything?

RICHARD COLBECK:

I've had the report for a couple of, a couple of hours, it has just been released. So I'll work through what the report says. I will take notice of what the report says and any modifications to our approach I will incorporate into our policy development work. I think it's important that we do that. We called the Royal Commission for a reason. We wanted a forensic investigation of the whole aged care system, one that hasn't been done in the form that it's been done through the Royal Commission for decades, in a generation. We need to digest the report, look at what it says and then work out how we take that forward as part of our process of reform, which the report clearly says is required.

JOURNALIST:

Minister you said the report was shocking, what was the most shocking thing you read in the report today?

RICHARD COLBECK:

Well look I think clearly the stories of neglect, the stories of the way that the system wasn't working for older Australians we need to turn that around and that's what the process is about, that's why we called the Royal Commission. As we heard before it came out of the terrible circumstances that came from Oakden and the report that came back from Kate Carnell and Mr Patterson. And the extent to which these things are occurring I think that's the thing that's struck me and that's what motivates me and my colleagues to act on the back of the report that's been handed down today and of course we look forward to the final report which will come down in November next year, which will have some much more substantial recommendations in it. Thank you.

JOURNALIST:

Minister you've been in Government for six years now. Do you take some responsibility for the state of the sector?

RICHARD COLBECK:

I think all governments need to take some responsibility for it and I think that comes through in the report. I don't think this is necessarily about one side of politics or the other. This is about the way that the system has evolved and that's why I say that it puts governments on notice. It puts the industry on notice and it puts the Australian community on notice that we need to change the way that we approach how we care for older Australians.

Thank you.