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Federal funding shake-up confirms single national aged care advocacy provider

The Federal Government's shakeup of the aged care advocacy sector has today been confirmed, with a single organisation awarded \$25.7 million over three years to deliver a new national service system.

From July 1, the Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN) – a recently formed entity comprising nine state and territory aged care advocacy organisations – will deliver advocacy services under the National Aged Care Advocacy Program's new national framework.

OPAN chairperson Craig Gear said the funding would allow the organisation to deliver high-quality advocacy, information and education services to help empower older Australians accessing, or seeking to access the aged care system across the country.

"We want older Australians to be armed with the right knowledge, support and resources so that they can better protect themselves, and can live actively and happily in their later years," he said.

"The value and benefits that flow from OPAN's centrally governed and managed entity will ensure we can deliver significant value for each region and to the consumers we service across Australia."

OPAN Acting Executive Officer Fiona May said the Government's decision to fund the national organisation eliminated risk and costs because OPAN could deliver services from day one.

"Our connected, integrated approach allows us to leverage existing networks, linkages and relationships we have built over the past 25 years, which are underpinned by trust, which is not easily or quickly replaced," she said.

"No other organisation offers the same services, knowledge and practice experience to deliver quality services and continuity from the outset – and we are thrilled to receive this funding certainty."

The funding will allow OPAN to increase its regional presence from 21 existing sites to 28 over the next two years, expand the range and delivery of education services in all Australian states and territories, while delivering new, scalable education to the most regional and remote parts of Australia.

“Our goal is to deliver service excellence to all clients, carers, families and special needs groups, irrespective of location, and achieving this is only possible with a capable, scalable and agile workforce that can advocate collectively on national policy reforms,” Mr Gear said.

Mr Gear said that, in many cases, advocacy and information support in rural and remote areas was delivered by phone, but in other cases – especially for special needs groups such as culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders – face-to-face delivery was essential.

“We have seven new locations planned for 2017-19, to increase the reach of services in Victoria and New South Wales, as well as an enhanced web and social media presence to provide clients and families new opportunities for digital interaction,” he said.

“We aim to provide a personalised service that meets the needs of each individual and their families. As part of this, we will be developing a range of on-demand content – including digital information packs, webinars and education services – to ensure families needing our services can connect online.

“OPAN provides a trusted culture where people from marginalised groups, and CALD communities, know that help is available and accessible.”

“Our advocates offer an incredibly important service for vulnerable Australians. Last year alone, we provided direct individual advocacy support to more than 9,000 people, provided information to 21,000 individual consumers and family members, and delivered education sessions to more than 42,000 people.”

Key elements in OPAN’s national service delivery model include the integration and co-ordination of people, processes and policies, systems, information, innovation and governance.

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Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN) comprises the nine state and territory service delivery organisations that deliver advocacy services for the National Aged Care Advocacy Program. OPAN employs more than 57 staff and services Australians in all cities, regional and remote areas from its 21 locations. OPAN’s vision is to become the single, effective, standardised entity that drives the future of high-quality aged advocacy information and education services within Australia. Their website will launch on 1 July 2017- www.opan.com.au

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