



Clinical governance in aged care

## Fact sheet 1:

# Introduction to clinical governance

**This is the first in a series of fact sheets about clinical governance in aged care that aim to help aged care providers meet their responsibilities for ensuring the quality and safety of clinical care.**

**This fact sheet is for members of governing bodies, executives and managers of residential, home care and flexible care services; as well as those Commonwealth Home Support Program services that deliver clinical care.**

It introduces core concepts about clinical governance that aged care providers need to apply to their own services.



## Why do you need to read this fact sheet?

As a Commonwealth-funded aged care provider, your aged care service has committed to provide quality care for consumers that protects and promotes their health and wellbeing. This care is a core function of aged care services and essential for maintaining and improving the wellbeing and quality of life of aged care consumers. Aged care providers have an obligation to provide care and services that align with the requirements of the *Aged Care Act* (1997), including the Aged Care Quality Standards, and Charter of Aged Care Rights. Your governing body<sup>1</sup> is accountable for the quality and safety of clinical care in your service.

To fulfil this commitment, it is essential that you have effective governance arrangements in place. **Corporate governance** relates to the systems by which an organisation is controlled and operates, and the mechanisms by which it, and its people are held to account.

**Clinical governance** should be included in your broader corporate governance arrangements if your service offers residential care, home care, short term restorative care, transition care, Multi-Purpose Services Program services, and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care Program services.

If your service is a part of the Commonwealth Home Support Program and delivers clinical care you also need to include clinical governance in your corporate governance arrangements. If your service is part of the Commonwealth Home Support Program and does not deliver clinical care, you do not need to have a clinical governance framework.

This fact sheet introduces the core concepts of clinical governance, and describes how clinical governance links with the Aged Care Quality Standards. It will help you understand clinical governance, why it is important for you, your consumers and your workforce,<sup>2</sup> and the responsibilities of your service. Having mastered these concepts, you can then apply them to your service to review or establish your own clinical governance arrangements – which will be informed by the particular care and services you deliver, the needs of your consumers, and your workforce profile.

1 The governing body is the individual or group of people with overall responsibility and ultimate accountability for the organisation. This includes responsibility for the strategic and operational decisions that affect the quality and safety of care and services.

2 In this fact sheet the term 'workforce' applies to all personnel who are employed or contracted by an aged care service. This includes health practitioners, staff who provide personal care, and staff who have an indirect role in providing care to consumers.

### Clinical care

Clinical care is health care that encompasses the prevention, treatment and management of illness or injury, as well as the maintenance of psychosocial, mental and physical wellbeing.

Clinical care should be best practice and guided by the needs, goals and preferences of consumers. Clinical care is part of the entirety of care and services received by and delivered in partnership with aged care consumers, and an holistic and person-centred approach should be taken when clinical care is provided.

Not all aged care services deliver clinical care. Where they do, it can be delivered by health practitioners (such as doctors, nurses and allied health professionals) who are employees or contractors, or by other staff (such as personal care workers) under the supervision or direction of health practitioners. Clinical care can also be delivered, supervised or directed by visiting health practitioners.

### What is clinical governance?

Clinical governance is an integrated set of leadership behaviours, policies, procedures, responsibilities, relationships, planning, monitoring and improvement mechanisms that are implemented to support safe, quality clinical care and good clinical outcomes for each aged care consumer.

The purpose of clinical governance is to support the workforce and visiting practitioners in your service to provide safe, quality clinical care as part of an holistic, person-centred approach to aged care that is based on the needs, goals and preferences of consumers. All care provided to consumers, including clinical care, should be directed to optimising their wellbeing and quality of life.

Clinical governance provides the framework for you to organise and structure what you do to support good clinical outcomes for consumers. It is a way of thinking about clinical quality and safety that should infuse all aspects of the operations of your service and influence its culture; how it is led and managed; workforce profile and skillset; systems, policies and procedures; the built environment and other infrastructure. Clinical governance is part of corporate governance, and should be 'normal business' if your service delivers, or hosts the delivery of clinical care; it is not something extra that you and your workforce need to address on top of providing care and services to consumers.

A clinical governance framework describes the organisational approach for ensuring the quality and safety of clinical care for consumers. The content, format and presentation of a clinical governance framework will vary depending on the specific characteristics of each aged care service. A home care service where clinical care is limited to wound dressing and prompting consumers who are generally well to take their medication is likely to have a simpler clinical governance framework than a residential service caring for consumers with advanced chronic health conditions that may include dementia.

### Why is clinical governance important?

Clinical governance is important because it establishes the systems and processes to support consistent clinical quality and safety in the often complex environments that can exist in aged care.

Clinical care is typically one part of a wider range of care and services provided to an aged care consumer. As such, it contributes to supporting an individual's wellbeing and quality of life. The corollary of this is that poor or inappropriate clinical care can result in, or contribute to negative experiences, poor quality of life and poor outcomes. These consequences can have a significant impact for aged care consumers, who are often frail and vulnerable; poor clinical care can lead to harm and premature death.

Implementation of effective clinical governance can identify and manage clinical risks for consumers, prevent harm, and improve the processes of clinical care, leading to better clinical outcomes and improved wellbeing.

Everyone in aged care has a role in the quality and safety of clinical care – consumers, the workforce, visiting practitioners, executives and managers, and members of the governing body – and clinical governance provides the framework for people to understand their roles and responsibilities, and be supported to achieve them.

### Core elements of clinical governance

The variety of different settings and models in aged care means that there is no single best practice approach to clinical governance. However, across all types of aged care services there are core elements of effective clinical governance. When establishing and reviewing the clinical governance arrangements in your service, you should take a systematic approach to action in each of the following areas.

#### A. Leadership and culture

Leaders ensure the service is actively pursuing the provision of safe, quality clinical care for their consumers. They build a culture that supports and promotes consistent clinical quality and safety and integrates clinical governance into corporate governance. Leaders foster a culture of openness, partnership, learning and continuous improvement.

#### B. Consumer partnerships

The needs, goals and preferences of consumers should guide the delivery of clinical care. There is a culture of partnership, where consumers are provided with information and supported to express their wishes and make decisions about their clinical care. There are processes to ensure informed consent occurs.

#### C. Organisational systems

There are policies, processes and systems to actively manage and improve clinical quality and safety in line with best practice that are embedded in broader corporate governance arrangements. They cover clinical risk areas (such as infection control), clinical practice (such as assessment and planning), and processes that support the

effective delivery and continuity of clinical care (such as risk management and record keeping). Incidents about clinical care are recorded, reviewed and used for improvement. The workforce is aware of the policies, procedures and systems, and use them to support clinical quality and safety.

#### D. Monitoring and reporting

Monitoring of clinical quality and safety performance includes collection and review of data relating to the experience of consumers, as well as clinical risk, practice, and outcomes. Clinical quality and safety performance is reported to the governing body, workforce and consumers.

#### E. Effective workforce

The workforce and visiting practitioners understand and are supported to enact their roles and responsibilities for clinical quality and safety. Health practitioners have access to best-practice information and are appropriately qualified and sufficiently skilled to deliver and supervise safe, quality clinical care.

#### F. Communication and relationships

There is good internal communication about clinical quality and safety. Open disclosure processes are used to communicate with consumers and their representatives if something goes wrong. There is good communication and effective relationships with visiting practitioners and external health providers.

See *Fact sheet 3: Core elements of clinical governance* for more information about these areas, including actions that can be taken to address each one.

### Clinical governance and the Aged Care Quality Standards

The framework for quality and safety in aged care, including clinical care, is set by the Aged Care Quality Standards. The eight Quality Standards are:

1. Consumer dignity and choice
2. Ongoing assessment and planning with consumers
3. Personal care and clinical care
4. Services and supports for daily living
5. Organisation's service environment
6. Feedback and complaints
7. Human resources
8. Organisational governance.

While Standard 3 is specifically concerned with the delivery of clinical care, and a clinical governance framework is required under Standard 8, clinical governance is relevant across all the Quality Standards, and having effective clinical governance arrangements in place will help you meet the Quality Standards.

The quality assessment and compliance monitoring processes of the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission will consider the experiences of consumers, the delivery of clinical care and use of a clinical governance framework to support clinical quality and safety. A clinical governance framework will support the organisation to meet requirements of the Quality Standards such as managing high risks associated with the care of each consumer, managing end-of-life care, recognising and responding to changes in a consumer's condition, effectively communicating within and between services, managing referrals, and addressing systemic priorities such as reducing inappropriate antibiotic prescribing and the inappropriate use of physical and chemical restraint.

See ***Fact sheet 2: Clinical governance and the Aged Care Quality Standards*** for more information about the links between clinical governance and the Quality Standards.

### Responsibility and accountability for clinical quality and safety

Your service is responsible for ensuring the quality and safety of clinical care provided to consumers. Health practitioners who deliver clinical care also have responsibilities; they must deliver care that meets relevant professional standards, and your service is responsible for supporting them to do so.

Your governing body is accountable for clinical quality and safety when care is delivered by health practitioners who are employed or contracted by your service, or by personal care workers or other staff under the delegation, supervision and direction of health practitioners.

When care is delivered by visiting practitioners, this care is delivered in partnership with consumers and your service. Visiting health practitioners are accountable for their clinical quality and safety; however, your service also has responsibilities when this occurs. These responsibilities can include:

- Checking the registration status of visiting practitioners
- Consulting with, and providing information to visiting practitioners about the clinical governance framework and the policies and procedures of the organisation, and monitoring that they are being complied with
- Establishing communication and other protocols and agreements with visiting practitioners about the provision of clinical care
- Providing appropriate infrastructure to enable the provision of safe, quality clinical care
- Enabling the documentation of treatment decisions

- Confirming that there have been appropriate informed consent processes
- Monitoring the outcomes of consumers' clinical care
- Taking action if there are unexpected outcomes or other concerns.

### Clinical quality and safety

To ensure the provision of safe, quality clinical care everyone needs to understand what quality and safety of clinical care looks like, and the quality and safety goals of consumers in your service.

There are core elements of clinical quality and safety that are important for consumers of all aged care services. In establishing or reviewing your clinical governance arrangements to support the provision of safe and quality clinical care, you should consider whether clinical care:

- Is **personal** and provided with kindness and compassion, responding to the holistic needs of the consumer and aiming to improve their wellbeing and quality of life
- Is smoothly **coordinated** when care is provided by the workforce, visiting practitioners, and external providers (where relevant)
- Is **effective**, providing the right care to meet each consumer's desired clinical outcomes
- Keeps consumers **safe** from preventable harm such as infections, oversedation or pressure injuries.

### Responsibility for clinical governance

The governing body has ultimate accountability for clinical quality and safety in an aged care service, and everyone working in a service is accountable for their contribution to safe, quality clinical care. When developing your clinical governance framework, it is important to be clear about roles and responsibilities. Broadly, roles and responsibilities for clinical governance are as follows:

**Governing body:** The governing body is accountable for ensuring your aged care service delivers safe, quality clinical care. It does this by leading an active pursuit of clinical quality and safety across the service, ensuring there are appropriate clinical governance arrangements in place that are operating effectively, understanding key risk areas, monitoring safety and quality performance, driving continuous improvement and delegating responsibility for clinical quality and safety to the executive.

**Executives and managers:** Executives have delegated responsibility for overall operational management of your service, including the quality and safety of clinical care. Operational managers have day-to-day oversight of clinical quality and safety in their areas of responsibility. They are responsible for ensuring that the service's clinical governance arrangements are operating effectively, and supporting the workforce and visiting practitioners to consistently deliver safe, quality care to consumers.

**Health practitioners:** Employed, contracted and visiting health practitioners are responsible for working within the clinical governance framework to deliver safe and quality clinical care. The provision of clinical care is typically part of an holistic approach to the delivery of all care to optimise the wellbeing of consumers. Health practitioners are responsible for meeting their professional and registration requirements, and for practising in accordance with these requirements, their ethical codes and their legal obligations.

**Personal care staff:** As part of an holistic approach to care, staff who provide personal care to consumers, such as personal care workers, can also have a role delivering clinical care. When this occurs, they are delivering clinical care under delegation from health practitioners, and should be supervised by them, or working under their direction. Personal care staff are responsible for working within the clinical governance framework to support clinical quality and safety when they are providing personal care and clinical care under delegation.

**Other staff:** Some of the workforce in an aged care service have an indirect role in providing clinical or personal care to consumers. These staff can still have a role in ensuring clinical quality and safety (in areas such as washing their hands and knowing how to call for assistance in an emergency), and need to understand these responsibilities and be supported to fulfil them.

See *Fact sheet 4: Roles and responsibilities for clinical governance* for more information about roles and responsibilities for clinical governance.





## Actions you can take after reading this fact sheet

- Review the charter or terms of reference for your governing body to ensure it includes oversight of clinical care
- Discuss with senior executives how well managers and the workforce understand their roles and responsibilities for clinical quality and safety and how they are supported to fulfil them
- Use self-assessment tools to understand and assess the efficacy of the clinical governance arrangements in your service
- Review the reporting arrangements to your governing body and ensure they include the quality and safety of clinical care

## Resources

### Clinical governance fact sheets

- Fact sheet 2: Clinical governance and the Aged Care Quality Standards
- Fact sheet 3: Core elements of clinical governance
- Fact sheet 4: Roles and responsibilities for clinical governance

### Clinical governance framework toolkit

- Developing and implementing a clinical governance framework
- Organisational self-assessment tool 1: Aged care service and consumers
- Organisational self-assessment tool 2: Clinical governance arrangements
- Clinical governance framework guide

### Other resources

- Guidance and resources for providers to support the new Aged Care Quality Standards: [agedcarequality.gov.au/providers/standards](https://agedcarequality.gov.au/providers/standards)
- Charter of Aged Care Rights: [agedcare.health.gov.au/quality/single-charter-of-aged-care-rights](https://agedcare.health.gov.au/quality/single-charter-of-aged-care-rights)
- Governance Institute of Australia, Adding value to governance in aged care: [governanceinstitute.com.au/resources/free-guide-adding-value-to-governance-in-aged-care/](https://governanceinstitute.com.au/resources/free-guide-adding-value-to-governance-in-aged-care/)



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