

The aged-care industry crucial to SA economy

AS WE head towards the federal election amid the debate on troops in Iraq and climate change, one major issue that cannot be ignored is the future demand of aged-care services in this state.

Australian Bureau of Statistics figures indicate that, by 2051, about 26 per cent of South Australia's population is likely to be aged 65 or over, nearly double that of 1997.

Our median age will have jumped from 36 to 48. Currently we have the oldest population in Australia and, by 2021, the number of people 65 and over in SA is expected to exceed the number of children for the first time in history.

Not only do these figures paint a bleak picture for SA's population growth but they highlight the increasing future demand for aged-care services.

Many of Business SA's members operate within the aged-care sector. They face a rapidly shifting landscape in which consumer demands are changing and new styles of care are being sought.

It is expected that the demand for high-care facilities will only increase as our median age climbs.

The aged-care industry is crucial to the state's economy and Business SA is working closely with the Aged Care Association of SA to



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apply a broader business approach to the issues facing the sector.

Two of the most urgent issues focus on funding levels and workforce development. There is concern that the package announced by the Federal Government in February may not provide sufficient gains to the aged-care sector and could mean inadequate funding for many providers in the state.

Business SA is acutely aware of the need for more investment in new, high-care residential places to meet the growth in demand brought about by the rapid ageing of the SA population.

Measures must also be taken to address the development of the aged-care workforce. The industry is facing a critical skills crisis, with poor wages, over-reliance on agencies, inexperienced carers and over-worked staff.

I urge the Government to review its package and consult industry further so that it can secure the future of this vital sector.

□ Peter Vaughan is the chief executive officer of Business SA