



Role and significance

CLINICAL GOVERNANCE

This theme on the role and significance of clinical governance is a summary of one of the key topics identified by a narrative review of the clinical governance in aged care literature.

What is clinical governance?

All aged care organisations have a commitment to provide safe, quality care that protects and promotes the person-centred health and wellbeing of their care recipients. [1] Clinical governance describes the approach an organisation takes to ensure good clinical outcomes. [2] Positive leadership ensures that relationships and responsibilities are established between the organisation's key stakeholders including the governing body (which may include a board of directors), executives, clinicians, care workers, care recipients and their families. [1, 3] High-quality, safe clinical and care outcomes are supported by the policies, procedures, and ongoing monitoring and improvement mechanisms that the organisation must implement to achieve its clinical care goals. [4]

The Australian Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (ACQSC) describes the role of clinical governance to be 'to provide safe, quality clinical care as part of a holistic approach to aged care that is based on the needs, goals and preferences of consumers.' [1 p3]

The ACQSC suggests there are six core elements that form the pillars of good clinical governance which can be mapped against the [Aged Care Quality Standards](#). [5] These elements are:

- Leadership and culture
- Consumer partnerships
- Organisational systems
- Monitoring and reporting
- Effective workforce
- Communication and relationships. [1, 6]

The role and significance of each of these elements are covered in detail on the [ARIIA website](#).

The role and significance of clinical governance in aged care

The role of clinical governance in aged care is to assure that all clinical aspects of care for older people are holistic and person-centred, recognising individuality and context. [7, 8] Good clinical governance supports regulatory responsibilities and duty of care to provide organisations with a structure that achieves minimum care standards. [9] All stakeholders, including older people, should therefore be involved in the planning, development, and assessment of care, to design a functioning framework that accommodates the needs of care recipients and the organisation. This process should consider that 'a safe experience may not be a person-centred one and a good experience might not be a safe one.' [8, p10]

A framework for planning high-quality care services

A clinical governance framework is now a regulatory requirement for all aged care organisations (Outcome 5.1 of the [Revised Aged Care Quality Standards](#)). [10] It is the governing body's responsibility to develop this single overarching framework, [10, 11] which reflects the aged care service as well as the specific characteristics and needs of the population it serves. [1, 12] There is no 'one size fits all' approach to clinical governance for aged care providers [2, 13] and clinical governance frameworks should be personalised to fit the organisation. [14]

The organisation's clinical governance framework should be comprehensive to cover all relevant areas of oversight and flexible to be inclusive of all people receiving care, including those with different needs, physical or cognitive abilities, and levels of social connectedness. [15] Such frameworks should bring together clinical governance systems and relevant activities already delivered across the organisation. [12] The framework document might describe all roles across the organisation that provide care and their associated responsibilities while mapping the relationships between these roles alongside lines of accountability within the organisational structure. [4, 5] It will also address core elements of clinical governance set forward by the ACQSC. [16]

The effective development and delivery of clinical governance frameworks in aged care have not been widely researched and reported, however, an integrated approach to clinical governance is needed. [2] In developing the clinical governance framework, the governing body should recognise the importance of:

- Setting a clear vision with a strategic direction, incorporating strong leadership and culture that delivers safe, quality, and consistent care
- Leading the organisational culture to be visibly engaging and accessible to the workforce to support communication and relationships
- Acknowledging that leaders can include frontline workers and care recipients at all levels

- Ensuring organisational culture is open and transparent by communicating the organisation's core goals and values to build consumer partnerships
- Ensuring implementation of robust organisational systems to effectively support and empower the workforce and visiting practitioners, to provide safe, quality clinical care
- Understanding key clinical risks for the organisation and ensuring that controls and mitigation strategies are in place by implementing and following clear monitoring and reporting standards
- Ensuring that all controls and mitigation strategies are reviewed regularly to ensure they remain effective
- Continuous improvement of any part of the clinical governance framework, suggested by any of the organisation's stakeholders. [2, 4]

Meeting regulatory requirements

Clinical governance provides a framework that supports aged care providers to meet regulated standards of care. [2] From this framework, the organisation develops and implements the policies, processes, procedures, and systems it needs to drive the delivery of high-quality, safe care in line with regulatory requirements. These should cover:

- clinical risk areas, e.g., infection control [1, 3, 17]
- clinical practice, e.g., assessment and planning [1]
- medication management, e.g., antimicrobial stewardship [3, 17]
- effective delivery and continuity of clinical care, e.g., risk management and record keeping [1]
- data governance [18]
- the rapid implementation of assessment tools. [19]

A framework offers an integrated system to manage the safety and quality of clinical care, to define clear roles, responsibilities, and accountability, [13] and to facilitate regulatory compliance to the Aged Care Quality Standards, [20] [Code of Conduct for Aged Care](#), [21] funding arrangement compliances, and accreditation standards.

Supporting the workforce to provide safe, high-quality care

Good clinical governance supports the workforce and visiting practitioners to provide safe and quality clinical care. A well-defined clinical governance framework provides clear guidelines to support care providers to deliver care in a way that meets the organisation's duty of care responsibilities, relevant professional standards, regulations, and guidelines. [1, 14] In turn, the governing body's responsibility extends to ensuring the highest level of care is provided by all staff working in the organisation, including visiting health practitioners who deliver clinical care to the organisation. [2] The whole workforce needs to be adequately qualified and have sufficient skills to undertake their clinical roles. They also need to be adequately supported to feel safe to speak out when they have concerns. [2] Everyone in

the organisation must 'own' the goals and values of the organisation and strive towards the common practice of safe, clinical care. [2]

Finally, an important role of organisational governance is to have mechanisms in place to identify and mitigate risks to care recipients, family carers, and the workforce. [25] People in aged care can have complex needs and, as such, are vulnerable to harm. Being aware of their individual needs and managing any associated risks (e.g., harm due to a fall, physical restraint, or unplanned weight loss) is a core purpose of clinical governance. [23]

Managing risks across the organisation

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ARIIA was established as an independent, not-for-profit organisation, set up to lead the advancement of the aged care workforce capability by promoting and facilitating innovation and research to improve the quality of aged care for all Australians.

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