

Mission critical

How do leaders across the aged care and retirement living sectors value mission? CEOs and Board Chairs weigh in.

BY LAUREN BROOMHAM

We asked leaders from across the Not For Profit and For Profit sector for their thoughts on mission – here's what they had to say.

Ray Glickman

*FROM LEFT FIELD PRINCIPAL AND
CURTIN HERITAGE LIVING BOARD CHAIR*

What does 'mission' mean to you?

As a consultant, mission equates to the purpose of an organisation. Much of the work that I do on strategy is to ask boards and executives the question, 'Why does your organisation need to exist now?'



Ray Glickman

Mission has this almost-religious connotation that sits with Not For Profits as to there's a deeper purpose as to why they exist, what they are here to do, but there are many For Profit operators who are in this game because they care about making a difference as well, but they just do different things with any surpluses – if they make them.

What role has it played in your career direction?

I often work with organisations where boards and executive groups feel like they don't have the clarity required to generate a successful business model. Again, it goes back to that fundamental question: why should we exist now? It also begs the question: why wouldn't we merge with another organisation that is similar and become more sustainable?

I have been part of a very successful merger here in WA between three similar organisations into aged care, disability and mental health provider Chorus and that was interesting from a few perspectives. All of the board members and executives did the right thing by falling on their swords. Finally, we had a clear purpose for the new organisation, which was not just to be bigger, but to be different and to become an organisation that is fundamentally about

community development, building on the strengths of communities.

The disappointments in my consulting career are where you are asked to go into an organisation and help them review themselves. When you hold the mirror up to some boards and say, 'Well, have a look at what you need to be able to do these days for good governance and really how you are and who you have,' that often leads to the end of the work because fundamentally people don't want to face up to that truth. In the various parts of our sector, as we try to be more successful in tough, challenging times, we need good governance and the capability behind organisations to make good decisions.

How do you see mission playing out in your organisation?

As the Chair of Curtin Heritage Living, we have gone through these fundamental questions and we do have a clear vision. We are very much focused on the needs of our community, and we have a strong plan that we're working to, which is first of all to bring our primary facilities up to modern standards.

Our vision is in keeping with the approach proposed by the Royal Commission which says that there should be a seamless continuum of care offered to people whether they live in the family home, a retirement community or nursing home. Recently to enhance our offering as part of our vision to support older people in our catchment, we have merged with Shine Community Services, an in-home care organisation so we can offer a wider range of choices to our local community.

It is important to have a good business model. At Curtin, we see that we need to have a broadly based business, primarily because then we are relevant to all older people and not just part of that spectrum, but also because I have the direct experience of having been CEO of a large organisation that these broader based businesses are more sustainable. By having this end-to-end service, you also

build a pipeline of customers that have a loyalty to you.

Do you think the role of mission will change in aged care and retirement living in the future?

No, I think that essentially the Royal Commission was a rehash of Caring for Older Australians, but less coherent. I don't see any sign of the positive philosophy behind it actually emerging in policy. I like to think that at Curtin, we are actually working hard to deliver on that philosophy, which is a seamless transition through supports, delivered into the particular living environment of your choice.

Also, in arguing for a rights-based system, the Royal Commission departed from a user-pays system. Without society putting its hands in the pockets of the affluent Baby Boomers who have amassed significant assets, it is hard to see how we can support the growing numbers of older people in a sustainable fashion.



Norah Barlow

HERITAGE LIFECARE CEO

What does 'mission' mean to you?

Mission for me is the reason we exist, what we are trying to do, and how we judge success. In aged care, my mission is to ensure that we support our residents to have the very best experience they can during this critical time of their lives, while recognising that this will represent how they are often remembered by their family. That mission is critical to the end-of-life process. To judge how successfully we do this is hard, as all too often in all forms of health, we get told of mistakes, but not told of our successes. So, I evaluate this a lot by walking around, and seeing people interacting with others, hearing people laughing, hearing them singing, and listening to the chatter.



I feel that, while this is of course a business, the product we supply to our people is such an important area of their lives. To be there at the end of life is precious, and I understand and take very seriously that responsibility to provide the very best of experiences at this precious time for the recipient of our care, and for their family.

What role has it played in your career direction?

The very fact of being in aged care for so long, is testament to the fact that I love what we do. Every day we have a purpose to fulfil, and every day, we strive to do it to the best of our ability.

How do you see mission playing out in your organisation?

I think in the homes it's easy to see this in action, where every day, they live and breathe that mission. They make every day

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choices based on this. It is often very hard to see this in the support functions, as it's hard for a person paying the bills to recognise how vital to our residents' life it is that the bill is paid. As companies get larger, this disconnect can be more difficult to overcome. We do this by helping support staff to work in the homes, and interact with residents and their families, so they see the impact of the mission we live by.

Do you think the role of mission will change in aged care and retirement living in the future?

As we all get larger to cope with increasing cost pressures by using scale, it can be harder to see the impact, so it can be harder to live and breathe the mission. So, while I don't see the mission changing, I do wonder how the larger scale will ensure that all parts of the organisation are connected to that mission.



Karen Borg

CATHOLIC HEALTHCARE CEO

What does 'mission' mean to you?

There is often confusion between mission and vision. While a vision is more of an aspirational statement, a mission is more fundamental – it's the reason we get up in the morning and what motivates us to keep going when there are challenges. More fundamentally, mission aligns to values, both for an individual and for an organisation. It is for this reason, that mission can propel us to great things as it aligns heart and head.

What role has it played in your career direction?

My personal mission has always been to create positive change. With that in mind, my observation is that older people in Australia are marginalised and as a society, we fear ageing. Aged care is

underfunded and regulators, while well-intentioned, have lost sight of the need to partner with providers to facilitate better outcomes. So, change is needed and on a substantial scale. As care in this area is primarily delivered by faith-based organisations, I wanted to be able to lead an organisation that could genuinely create better outcomes in communities and had a track record of doing this already.

Most importantly, my values aligned with those of Catholic Healthcare and I could see that the Board was genuinely committed to change so I wouldn't be alone in trying to improve delivery of care.

How do you see mission playing out in your organisation?

As a Catholic provider, it has always been our mission and our duty to provide for those in need, and that is certainly the case today with the challenges we are facing as a sector. To combat marginalisation, a key part of our mission will be creating connected communities that integrate aged care among other services and demographics and engage more proactively with the rest of the local community to enrich the lives of all.

Do you think the role of mission will change in aged care and retirement living in the future?

I'm a positive person, so I believe that we will change how we treat older Australians. I also see the daily commitment of our staff and how they care for our residents and clients, so I know that there are many extraordinary people who respect the dignity of older people.

I would like to see the relationship between Government and providers shift towards a partnership again. Our missions overlap so we need to work together to resolve some of the bigger challenges we are facing and ultimately promote the physical, spiritual and emotional wellbeing of older people. The way we deliver that will no doubt change in line with shifting consumer preferences and community needs, but at

its heart that will always be our reason for being as an organisation.



Frank Weits

ACH GROUP CEO

What does 'mission' mean to you?

Whilst we are all familiar with company mission statements, I strongly believe that everyone needs to take time to craft their personal mission statement to act as a guidepost for where they want to go in life. The cost of writing a mission statement is small, but the payoff is huge.

In writing my personal mission statement it was important to be realistic, so I don't set myself up for failure. It is also important to translate the statement into clear goals and review these goals on a regular basis.

What role has it played in your career direction?

From my student days onwards, I have asked myself – what is driving me and what is making me a better person, with a

fundamental desire that I want to contribute to my community in a way that works for me.

It has led me to migrate to Australia and pursue my specific career including a range of community-orientated board roles and now, working in a purpose-led organisation, which has a mission focused on making a meaningful difference in the lives of older people.

How do you see mission playing out in your organisation?

Mission is critical to ACH Group. We see it as a point of difference to attract workforce and it underpins how we design and deliver our services.

I believe that people are increasingly seeking purpose and meaning through their work. Working for an organisation where staff personally align with the mission is becoming more important.

Do you think the role of mission will change in aged care and retirement living in the future?

It will get stronger because as stated above, people are increasingly seeking purpose and meaning through their work, but customers also expect and demand a variety of services and experiences from which they can choose. I believe the role of mission is a critical enabler to differentiate your organisation from another, noting that there isn't a right or wrong answer in your mission... the right staff and customers will come if you are clear on what you stand for.



Rachel Argaman

OPAL HEALTHCARE CEO

What does 'mission' mean to you?

My personal mission has always been to live with purpose and serve the community. My parents were active in community





service and always said to my sister and I that “human connection is the heart of well-being”. They stressed the value of serving one’s community. That has always been my value also. It remains a moral anchor in everything I do.

What role has it played in your career direction?

I spent the first 20 years of my career in the hospitality sector, which is 100% customer-centric. Ignore the customer in the hospitality sector, or treat them poorly, and you go out of business very quickly.

Four years ago, I was approached to bring that same fixation on service into residential aged care, which coincided with my personal exposure to the sector for the first time. My mother-in-law, Leeba, had been living in a Sydney aged care home that had good clinical care, but had limited recreation and where little effort was made to connect her with like-minded people who could become her friends. I joked to Leeba that she should take up smoking because the smokers were a real community, laughing and joking together in the sun-dappled light under the trees.

Separately, my own mum at the time was living in South Africa with Alzheimers’. Both experiences left me with the belief that an opportunity existed to create genuine communities in residential aged care, that

went beyond merely clinical wellbeing, and sought to bring people together as friends. The call, therefore, came at the perfect time.

How do you see mission playing out in your organisation?

I see Opal HealthCare, and all good aged care communities, as for purpose organisations. Across all our 84 Care Communities, we strive to give excellent clinical care as a basic need. We then add love and a sense of belonging.

Our purpose is to bring joy to those we care for, and our values are Compassion, Accountability, Respect, and Excellence.

Those values come alive in initiatives like our ‘meaningful mates’ program, that seeks to link residents with those who have shared principles and interests.

Human connection, as I said at the beginning, lies at the heart of wellbeing.

Do you think the role of mission will change in aged care and retirement living in the future?

With almost 5.6 million Australian Baby Boomers and more than 2,500 Australians retiring every week, Australia’s population is ageing. We all know that trend will gather greater momentum over the next two to three decades. What this means is that

‘mission’, or purpose, in aged care will grow more important to all Australians in the future.

What does that mean in practice? We all want to feel part of a community, knowing we can live with dignity and meaning, regardless of our age. That means we must deliver reablement and restorative care, transitional care for hospital patients, and design smarter homes. Living spaces should be designed that enhance wellbeing and connection, encourage intergenerational friendships that benefit young and old, build cultural connections, and maintain residents’ independence.

Perhaps most importantly, the challenge and mission for our country is to build a culture of respect for older Australians. This latter mission needs to be taken up at all levels of our society to create a better present and future for all of us.



Mike Baird

HAMMONDCARE CEO

What does ‘mission’ mean to you?

Living each day to make a difference to others.

When I decided to leave the banking sector in 2020, it was important to me to find a role where I could make a difference. I thought at the time I had a couple more executive roles in my career, and wanted to find purposeful work that impacted peoples’ lives.

What role has it played in your career direction?

It has been central to the key moments. Before I took the job with HammondCare, my mum was in residential care and it was challenging for me and my family to watch. The carers that stepped in to look after mum were like angels. I realised what an impact their work had. It left me with my



Rachel Argaman



own personal story about an area of life where care changes lives.

How do you see mission playing out in your organisation?

I am inspired every day by what I see at the frontline provided by staff at HammondCare. Especially over the last two years, they have endured so much to ensure those they care for are safe and well supported. We need to do more to support them, including better pay, more training and more recognition.

Last year HammondCare went through a process of working through our strategy for the coming years, the result was Next Chapter 2025. It was about how can we be most effective with our wonderful, committed staff and our expertise to pursue our Mission of improving the quality of life for people in need.

Following a long period of internal consultation, the ambition we set ourselves through this process was a big one – to lead the world in relationship-based care and to continue to care for many, who others can't or won't. We decided to focus ourselves as an organisation on being leaders in complex dementia, home care and palliative care.

Do you think the role of mission will change in aged care and retirement living in the future?

At HammondCare, I think we have got our Mission right – this won't change. But everyone in the sector, the Government and the community need to work together to ensure those older people in our care can meet rising expectations of what quality care is.

There are promising signs. We are seeing some big changes – both sides of politics have mostly agreed our frontline aged care workers deserve better pay. There is agreement to fund more care minutes and better-quality meals. Coming soon is a star ratings system which will put pressure on all providers to ensure higher care quality. It's been great to see aged care be an election issue during the Federal Election campaign – something we have not seen before.

We must always prioritise the elderly. We should not see aged care as another liability on the budget rather than all of us recognising that we, all together, have a responsibility to deliver an appropriate standard of care and respect for the elderly.

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