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Aged Care Service Delivery

National Seniors Australia (NSA) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Inquiry into the Aged Care Service Delivery. NSA is a peak consumer body representing older Australians with more than 270,000 members and supporters.

We represent and advocate for a system that is fair, transparent, accessible and responsive to the needs of current and future older people.

The Royal Commission into Aged Care has identified several areas where the needs of older people are not being fully met.

A key issue identified was waiting times for aged care. Although there has been a significant increase in the availability of Home Care Packages, the demand for support, especially for higher-level care packages, remains unmet. This is particularly true for older individuals who reside outside of major cities.

While the delay to 1 November 2025 offers more time for older people to understand changes to the system, it also delays access to vital protections and improved services. When we talk about packages, we are referring to older people, and each of these packages represents clinical care for a person.

We recommend:

- **The Department of Health, Disability and Ageing immediately increase the number of Home Care Packages to clear the wait list, ensuring timely access to essential supports for older people,**

Older people who receive aged care funding want to remain at home.

Should you require further information or input, please contact the NSA Policy Team via policy@nationalseniors.com.au.

Yours sincerely,



Chris Grice
Chief Executive Officer

The impact of the delay on older Australians waiting for support at home, including unmet care needs and the well-being of seniors and their carers.

Recommendation 1: The Department of Health, Disability and Ageing immediately increase the number of Home Care Packages to clear the wait list, ensuring timely access to essential supports for older people.

As we approach the fifth anniversary of the final report from the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, it is essential to recall one of its key recommendations. Home Care Packages (HCP) should be made available to eliminate the waitlist, ensuring individuals receive their packages within one month of their assessment.

The new Support at Home Program is a significant reform aimed at reshaping the future of aged care. It serves as a unified and simplified approach to delivering essential home services in home aged care directly to older people, aiming to reduce wait times for in-home care to three months by July 2027.

As of 31 March 2025, 87,597 older people are on the [National Priority List](#) who were waiting on HCP at their approved level. Of these people, 86,870 (99%) are in a lower level HCP and/or approved for CHSP services.

In the 2024/25 Federal Budget and the 2024/25 [Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook \(MYEFO\)](#), the government announced that a total of 31,715 packages would be made available in 2024/25, which includes 24,100 from the budget and 7,615 from MYEFO.

We are hopeful that the release of these packages will positively impact the waiting list, however, data regarding the situation at the end of the 2024/25 financial year is not yet publicly available. Consequently, it remains unclear how many people are currently still waiting for a package.

Information is also limited on whether the promised packages were released on time and what impact that has had on wait times. In our [previous submission](#) we highlighted that the proposed Support at Home system will require people assessed as having an 'urgent' need to wait at least one month to receive in-home care and support.

It is challenging to predict how much longer the wait times will increase due to these delays, especially with the recent [service disruptions](#) in conducting home care assessments. Delays for assessments have led [assessment organisations](#) to conduct evaluations by phone, which adds to further complications.

The following quotes reflect the experiences of NSA members who are currently in the system before the new Aged Care Act commences, who are still awaiting the support they need. We understand how challenging this situation is for them.

"We have waited 8 months to get an ACAT assessment for my 95 year old father to get him a level 3 package as he wants to stay in his home. My sister and I had to make multiple calls and emails to push for the ACAT — then they wanted to do it over the phone!!!! A 95 year old. I insisted it had to be face to face. Now we are in a holding pattern waiting for it to be applied— again we've been told it could be a year before it can be applied. So that now leaves the family trying to work and do all the extra care he needs. I don't know how some elderly people are able to navigate the system if they don't have family advocates."

“Now they need additional care to stay home and the situation of trying to get an assessment is unacceptable. To be told the assessment may happen in 1 years time is not good enough for them. They require help now! Mum has a chronic illness. Dad has often been her carer over the past 5 years, and he now has dementia which is becoming more pronounced. We’re doing everything we can to assist my parents to stay in their home. It feels like the system does not truly support this, although it is an evidence based strategy for increased wellbeing for older people.”

The published wait times for Home Care Packages only reflect the time from assessment to the allocation of the package, which does not include the entire amount of time people are waiting for the package to be allocated.

If the supply of packages does not keep pace with demand, it will lead to a growing waitlist and inadequate care. This situation will ultimately result in increased demand for expensive hospital and residential care. Limiting the availability of packages is a false economy, it merely shifts the need for care and support to other areas, often at a higher cost. For example, older people are being stranded in hospital settings because of difficulties accessing home care or residential care.

The Australian government mandated the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety to enhance the system’s sustainability and ensure that older people receive appropriate care. Delays in receiving essential clinical care and home support will potentially have a negative impact on both older adults and their caregivers.

We recommend that the Department prioritise clearing the aged care wait list as a matter of urgency.

The continued delays in accessing Home Care Packages undermine the objectives of the Aged Care Act 2024, which enshrines the right of older Australians to timely and equitable access to care.

The backlog has resulted in significant adverse outcomes, including premature admission to residential aged care and avoidable hospital presentations, thereby exacerbating pressures on the broader health system.

Failure to address the waitlist not only compromises consumer choice and dignity but also risks non-compliance with the principles of safety, accountability, and quality of life embedded in the new rights based aged care framework.

Clearing the HCP wait list is essential to ensure the Aged Care Act’s intent is realised in practice and that older people can receive the care and support they are entitled to without undue delay in advance of the new Support at Home packages commencing 1 November 2025.

The impacts on hospitals and state and territory health systems

Australians over 65 represent 17.1 per cent of Australia’s total population in 2023, yet this portion of our population represented 49.7 per cent of the total patient days. The increasing number of older patients using the public hospital system is placing a greater strain on our staff and patients. Across the nation, ambulances are spending considerably more hours ramped outside hospitals compared to just five years prior.

Figure 2: Population compared to public hospital patient days — by age (2022–23)

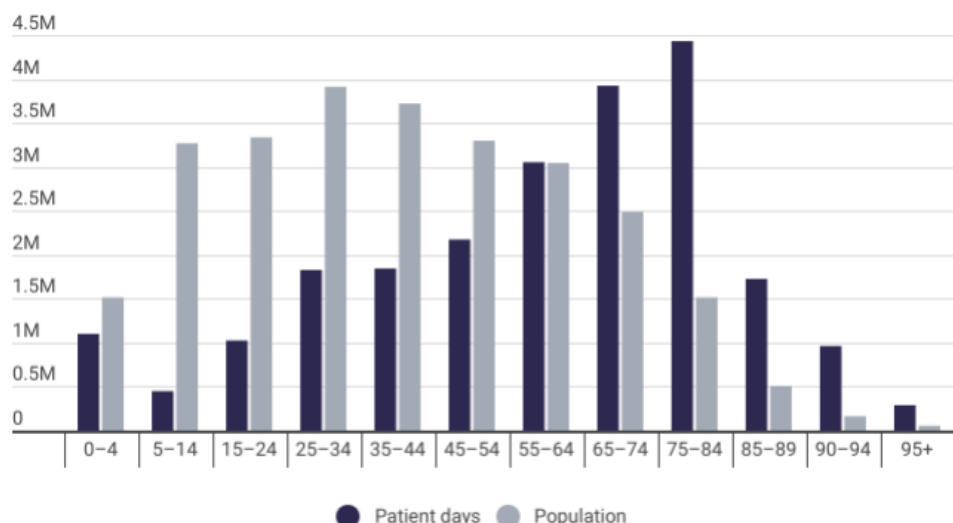


Figure 2 ABS data source AMA 2025 Public Hospital Report Card

The delayed implementation of the new Aged Care Act is already having significant flow-on effects on the Australian health systems, particularly hospitals. Older people who cannot access timely home care packages are being left without the necessary support to live safely and independently at home.

As a result, many are being admitted to the hospital for conditions that could otherwise be managed with appropriate community or in-home care. Hospitals are now seeing a higher percentage of older patients occupying acute beds, often staying longer due to delays in discharge when safe aged care services are not available. This will further contribute to bed shortages, longer emergency department wait times, and increased pressure on health professionals, further straining an already overstretched hospital system.

An exit block occurs when patients are ready for discharge, particularly those awaiting aged care or disability support, who cannot be moved, thus occupying beds that are needed for new admissions. Our public hospitals in states and territories have been in a logjam for years, and there is a higher percentage of older people being admitted to the Emergency Department.

This issue is expected to worsen as older individuals wait longer for their Support at Home Packages. The delays are a result of the decision to postpone the launch of the new Support at Home program.