

The Sydney Morning Herald

Elderly Australians dying while they wait for in-home aged care

By Farrah Tomazin

March 27, 2019 – 12:01am

Almost 128,000 Australians who have been approved for in-home aged care are still waiting for the support they need, with funding taking so long that some people have died before before they receive any money.

New government figures show that most people are waiting at least 12 months before they get the level of care they require, and also reveal that the number of older people in the queue has blown out significantly, with 23,000 more people than last year.



Almost 128,000 Australians assessed for in-home aged care are still sitting on the waiting list.

The ever-growing demand is the latest challenge to the Commonwealth's Home Care Package scheme, which provides older people with needs-based subsidies ranging from \$8,248 to \$50,148 a year, to be used on anything from help with showering or cooking, to social outings and medical aids.

The taxpayer-funded scheme is designed to ensure more people can remain at home as they get older, thereby delaying or avoiding a move to a nursing home.

However, The Sunday Age and The Sun Herald are aware of numerous cases where people have been assessed for a package by the government, but waited so long for the money to flow that they have died or been placed in residential care, before they could benefit.

Sydney aged care consultant Danielle Robertson said her father "never received a single cent" of his approved funding before he passed away last year, despite being assessed twice - the first time incorrectly - by the government's assessment agency, My Aged Care.



Aged care consultant Danielle Robertson is one of many people frustrated by the Commonwealth's Home Care Package scheme.

Another woman, Sharon Wallace, said her sick mother had been approved for a Level 3 funding package 18 months ago and was told she would get a Level 2 package in the interim, but “to date, nothing”.

“My experience with this aged care funding scheme has left me bewildered, frustrated and increasingly cynical,” she said. “Their hotline is a disappointment, and the fees charged to administer this flawed scheme is a ‘rent seeker’ rort.”

Several others have also posted their experiences on The Age’s Facebook page, with one person saying their father’s home care package eventually arrived, “one year after he already died!”

The revelations come as the Aged Care Royal Commission turns its attention to home care this week, and after a damning report obtained by The Sunday Age revealed systemic problems, including poor transparency, untrained staff, confusion, and the potential for widespread rorting.

This included some providers taking more than 50 per cent in so-called “case management” or “administrative fees”, fuelling concerns about the “commodification of the elderly” under Australia’s privatised aged care system.

Minister for Senior Australians and Aged Care and Minister Ken Wyatt, with Scott Morrison.

CREDIT: ALEX ELLINGHAUSEN



Aged Care Minister Ken Wyatt did not directly answer when asked if the waiting lists were acceptable. Instead, he pointed to an additional 20,000 home care packages that began rolling out this year as evidence that, “the Morrison government is committed to supporting senior Australians to age in their own homes for as long as they can”.

Mr Wyatt also noted that the latest data showed the vast majority people who had been assessed had been offered a lower level of help while they waited, through a complementary aged care scheme known as the Commonwealth Home Support Program.

Others, however, are scathing of the ballooning waiting lists for home care, with National Seniors Australia chief executive John McCallum describing it as a “running sore” and “a critical failure”.

“We know that home care, on level-one evidence, is preventative for death and preventative for hospital admission,” he said, during a recent hearing for the Aged Care Royal Commission. “It’s economically irrational, but we haven’t dealt with it.”

Researcher Dr Sarah Russell said there was also a lack of transparency about how the queue works.

“What criteria is used to assign packages? Is a human being or a computer algorithm responsible for assigning packages? Participants in my study said priority should be given to older people who do not have any family support,” she said.

[Farrah Tomazin](#)



Farrah Tomazin is an Investigative Reporter for The Sunday Age and The Sun Herald , with interests in politics, social justice, and legal affairs.