

Position Paper

Transforming the system of home care for older Australians

Introduction

A key theme highlighted in the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety's (2021) final report¹ was that older people want to remain at home. It was clear that the current aged care system is not providing older Australians in need with adequate access to services and supports to help them to remain at home. In their budget, the Government has responded by committing \$7.5 billion to support older Australians to remain at home, including \$6.5 billion for 80,000 home care packages over the next two years. The response has also included additional measures to improve assessment processes, oversight and transparency. While NARI welcomes the Government's commitment to providing additional packages and other incremental reform, we believe that systemic reform is required. We encourage the Government to carefully consider the Commissioner's extensive recommendations for home care reform, especially the need for substantial systemic change².

Providing more Home Care Packages as an interim measure is important, but without substantial change to the ration-based system this will provide temporary relief only. The waitlist will build up again as more and more people require aged care at home into the future. Comprehensive reform will be crucial for the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of the home care system. Under the current model, bundled funding is allocated to a limited number of older people in need. This model lacks flexibility and is not truly tied to the unique needs of each older person. While some older people with a Home Care Package have more than enough funds available in their budget than they need to use, many others wait to receive the funding they urgently need to meet their basic care needs. Funding needs to be better distributed so that it is allocated in a more cost-effective way, and so that every older person in need of care at home is able to receive it, when they need it. The Commissioners recommended an alternative model, taking the form of individualised budgets or case-mix classification, where funding can be iteratively adjusted to meet changing care needs. We encourage the government to consider and include such a model as part of the development of their new support at home program.

NARI supports the Commissioner's recommendation that the system of aged care should be needs-based, not rationed, similar to the way in which the health care system works³. Older people should not have to wait to receive the care that they urgently need. The impact of a new Aged Care Act will be limited in the absence of a strong commitment to the rights of older people and universal access to aged care.

The Government must continue its strong focus on transforming the system of home care well into the future. There is a pressing need for ongoing research and consultation with the aged care sector, older people, and their families and carers to comprehensively understand what is needed and what older people as well as the wider community are asking for as the sector undergoes change.

¹ <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report>

² see figure (below) for NARI's interpretation of the new model of care at home recommended by the Commissioners

³ <https://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/The-next-steps-for-aged-care-Grattan-report.pdf>

Summary of key points

Based on our research and experience in the aged care sector, NARI supports the following:

- Systemic, rather than incremental reform of the home care system, including:
 - Transition to a needs-based system of funding and delivering home care services where older people do not need to wait to access the care that they need
 - Funding that is personalised, flexible and closely aligned with the individual needs of each older person (under a model that takes the form of individualised budgets or case-mix classification)
 - The introduction of a more streamlined, flexible process of needs assessment to improve the experience of older people accessing home care services
 - Mechanisms that assist all older people to navigate and access the home care system and make informed choices, including the introduction of a network of care finders and improved quality regulation measures such as Star Ratings.

Figure 1: The current system for accessing home care

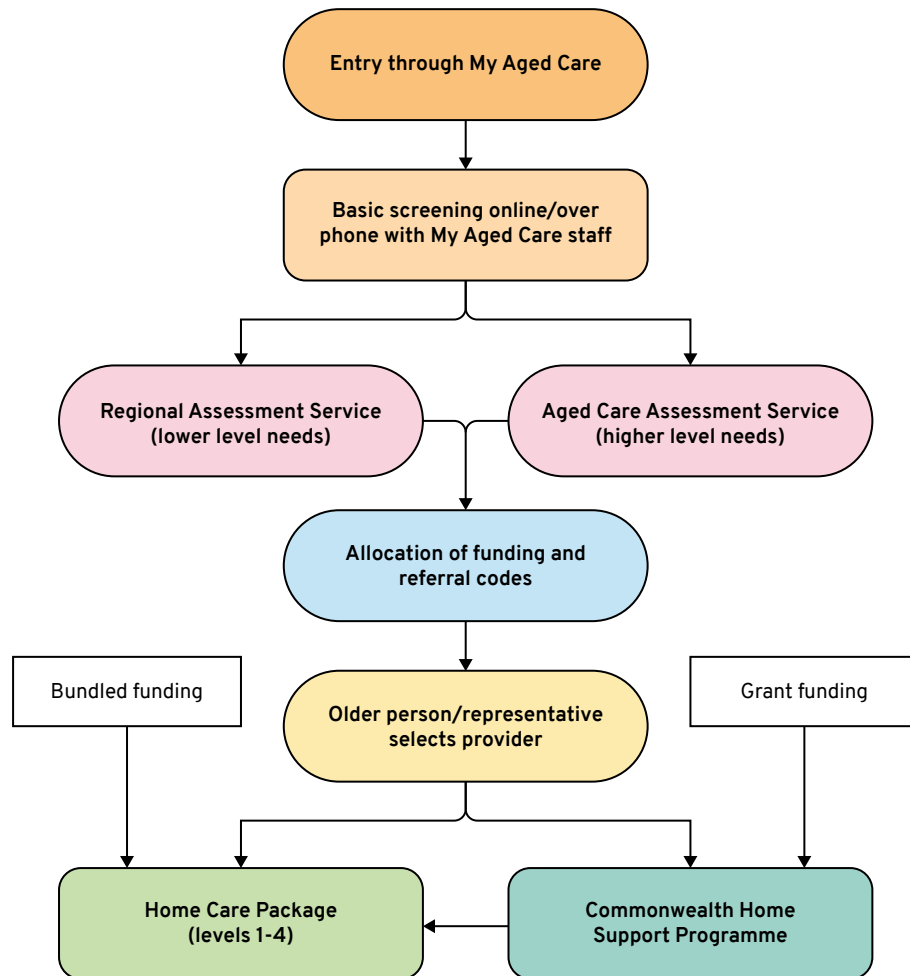
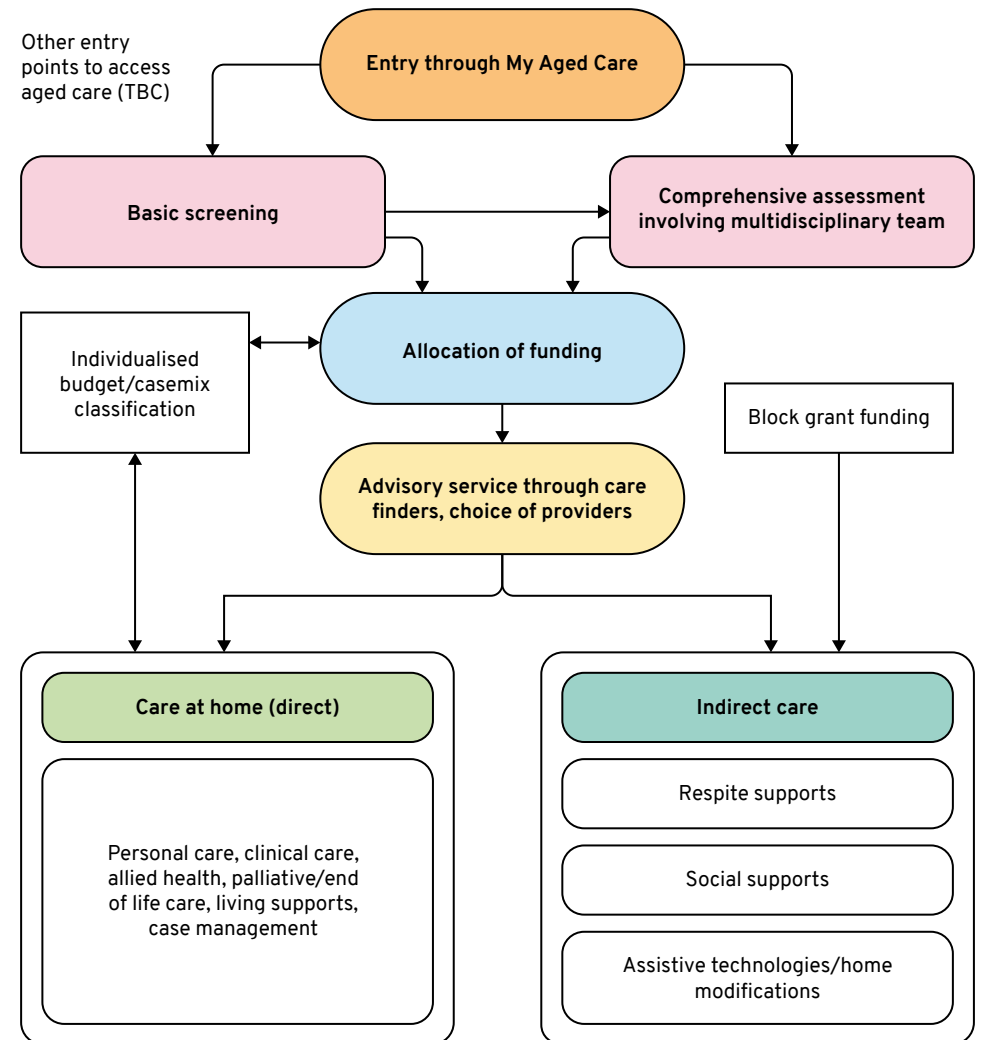


Figure 2: NARI's interpretation of what the Commissioner's proposed system for accessing home care would look like



Royal Commission	Government Response	NARI Response
System Design Recommendation 25: A new aged care program The existing programs should be combined into a new aged care program (Commonwealth Home Support Programme, Home Care Packages Program, and Residential Aged Care Program, including Respite Care and Short Term Restorative Care). The system should be needs-based and reflect that all older people are entitled to appropriate forms of support and care as informed by assessment. Under the proposed system, all are entitled to receive all forms of support and care they are assessed as needing. Recommendation 35: Care at home category The System Governor should be in a position to commence payment of subsidies for service provision within a new care at home category by 1 July 2024. This category should be developed and iteratively refined in consultation with the aged care sector and older people. The starting point for this consultation and refinement process should be that this category:	Accepted in principle, to be finalised following sector consultation and further model development. A new support at home program, the single assessment workforce (see recommendation 28) and other reforms such as Community Care Finders (see recommendation 29) will create an integrated aged care system that provides more choice for consumers. No commitment for a needs-based approach. Accepted in principle. The Government will finalise the design of a new support at home program, intended to commence from July 2023, following sector consultation and further model development.	NARI believes that all older Australians should be entitled to receive care when and where they need it, as is the case with most aspects of the healthcare system. While implementing a needs-based system of delivering home care would come at a substantial cost, and substantial system overhaul would be a challenging feat, we recognise that it is the only way to fairly and effectively meet the needs of older people. Funding should be linked to individual needs and care planning. NARI supports the recommendation for a new care at home category and believes that the system for home care is in need of fundamental reform. We agree that there is a pressing need for government to commit to a fundamentally changed new model of care at home that is developed and iteratively refined through research and consultation with the aged care sector and older people.

Royal Commission

Recommendation 28: A single comprehensive assessment process

By 1 July 2023, the Australian Government should replace the Aged Care Assessment Program and the Regional Assessment Services with one assessment process.

That assessment process should be undertaken by an independent assessor, occur before services commence, be scalable according to complexity of needs, and include assessment of the need for care management and any informal carer's needs.

Reasonable requests for reassessment should be able to be made.

Government Response

Accepted.

A single assessment workforce will be introduced, with a staged implementation.

The single assessment workforce will provide assessments for a new support at home program, which will commence from July 2023.

The assessment workforce will be recruited through an approach to market that allows all organisations with the capability to provide assessment services to participate.

NARI Response

NARI supports the introduction of a more streamlined, effective and flexible process of needs assessment that improves the experience of older people and their families when accessing aged care services.

One of the most pressing issues in home care is that the current process for assessing the needs of older people is inefficient, inadequate, and often does not result in the provision of services and supports that align with what an older person actually requires. There is a particular need for flexible assessment processes and funding allocation based on individual needs.

NARI is concerned about the government's proposal to open assessment services to the market. It is clear that utilising market mechanisms in the system of aged care more broadly has not always been effective. We caution the government against funding private organisations to provide assessment services, as this would compromise effectiveness and accountability.

Royal Commission

Recommendation 27: More accessible and usable information on aged care (Commissioner Briggs)

The Australian Government should continue to enhance My Aged Care to ensure it is the Government's official source of consistent, accessible, inclusive, reliable and useful information about the aged care system and aged care providers.

Government Response

Accepted.

The Government is continuing to enhance My Aged Care to ensure it provides consistent, accessible, inclusive, reliable and usable information on aged care. This includes ongoing investment to improve the provider search functionality. As new information about aged care providers becomes available, it will be added to My Aged Care to assist consumers to make informed decisions about who delivers care and services.

NARI Response

NARI supports continued efforts to enhance the My Aged Care website and the information it provides.

Currently, the website My Aged Care is the only entry point for accessing aged care services. The website does not provide sufficient information about the services that different aged care providers offer, or about the quality of these services, and older people often find the website challenging to navigate. We believe that the reforms proposed by the Government will go some way to improving the accessibility and usability of the information available on the website.

NARI also encourages the government to implement in-person entry points for older people to access home care services. Many older people are not able to access information online, and would prefer to speak to a person directly for information about their options and to access care.

Royal Commission

Recommendation 29: Care finders to support navigation of aged care (Commissioner Briggs)

From 1 July 2023, the Australian Government should fund the engagement of a workforce of personal advisers to older people, their families and carers, called 'care finders'. 2. The function of care finders will be to assist older people seeking aged care services with information about the aged care system and case management services.

Government Response

Accepted.

The Government will provide funding to establish face to face support for senior Australians to access information about aged care services, navigate the aged care system, and connect to services tailored to their needs.

Different levels of support will be provided to ensure people receive support commensurate to their needs. Face to face personalised support will be available in Services Australia service centres to help senior Australians navigate and connect to Government funded aged care services. A network of Community Care Finders will also be established to provide targeted, specialist face to face support to those who may not have capacity to seek out services for themselves. This service will also support these vulnerable senior Australians to access other supports at the local community level, such as health and social supports, where appropriate.

Implementation will occur progressively in stages, with personalised support in Services Australia being available from October 2021 and Community Care Finders commencing from January 2023.

NARI Response

NARI supports the proposal to create a new workforce of publicly available 'care finders', tasked with providing information and support to older people so that they can better navigate the aged care system and find suitable aged care services.

We believe that it is particularly important that these care finders provide ongoing navigation services that older people need even after their first assessment and direction to suitable aged care providers. It will also be crucial for Government to ensure that the workforce of care finders is capable and that they are employed at the regional level.

The system for home care is hugely complex and difficult to navigate, especially for older people who may be more vulnerable. There has been market failure in the aged care system, meaning that it is extremely difficult for older people to make informed decisions and to access home care that is value for money. For example, there is a lack of information available for older people to be able to compare the costs and value across many different home care providers. Although it would ultimately be beneficial to reduce the complexity of the system in the first instance, we acknowledge that this is not likely to occur in the near future. Accordingly, providing increased support to older people to navigate the system and access high-value home care will be crucial in the immediate future.

NARI recommends that the care finder service should be available to all people accessing aged care services, from an early stage. Although people who are vulnerable are particularly in need of this service, those who are 'capable' still need support to navigate the extremely complex aged care system.

Royal Commission

Recommendation 31: Approved provider's responsibility for care management

From July 2022, a person's approved provider must assign to them a care manager unless they have been assessed as not in need of a care manager.

Care management should be scaled to match the complexity of the older person's needs and be provided in a way that respects their wishes.

Government Response

Accepted.

The Government supports promotion of consumer choice and will enable consumers to have a say in selecting a care manager. The design of a new support at home program will be finalised following sector consultation and further model development.

NARI Response

NARI recognises the importance of high quality care management for older people where it is assessed as needed. Care managers should play a primary role in enabling older people to choose the services that are important to them.

We support the design of a system under which older people can have a say in selecting a case manager, and where the level of care management can be scaled to match the complexity of the older person's needs. The level of care management required by each consumer is varied, and this should be reflected in the amount that providers charge each consumer for care management.

Royal Commission	Government Response	NARI Response
Funding		
Recommendation 118: New funding model for care at home The Government should pay subsidies for care at home through a new funding model that takes the form of an individualised budget or casemix classification.	Accepted in principle, to be finalised following sector consultation and further model development. Work on the new funding model will examine the appropriate combination of block and activity based funding arrangements, as well as other approaches such as casemix funding.	NARI understands that the Government must take the time to further consider options for funding the new system of care at home. We believe it is crucial that funding is flexible, personalised and based on individual needs of older people living at home. Funding should no longer be rationed. We recommend that funding is closely integrated with care planning on an ongoing basis. Services being funded should be limited to what is assessed as necessary by an independent assessor, rather than a provider. Case-mix classification may be the best means to achieve this. Assessors' capacities to develop care plans and associated budgets must be greatly improved before this reform is implemented. There must also be mechanisms in place to ensure that budgets and associated delivery of services can be updated as the client's needs change over time. Any system of funding for home care needs to be flexible enough to meet changing care needs.

Royal Commission

Recommendation 39: Meeting preferences to age in place

The Government should clear the Home Care Package waiting list by:

- immediately increasing available Home Care Packages
- allocating a HCP to any new waiting list entrants within one month of their date of assessment from January 2022
- publicly reporting the status of the waiting list (quarterly) from March 2021

Government Response

The Government **accepts in principle** this recommendation, is committed to providing immediate access to home care packages to senior Australians with highest needs, and is responding through the measures Home Care Immediate investment to address critical need and **Home Care - Future design and funding**.

The Government has committed to funding an additional 80,000 home care packages over the next two years.

NARI Response

While NARI commends the funding of an additional 80,000 home care packages over the next two years, we recognise that as long as the current system stays in place, older people will continue to wait long periods of time to access home care.

As the population ages, a higher proportion of the population will require aged care services at home, and the demand for home care will increase. While the current extra provision will go some way to meeting the immediate need, it will not address the Commissioners recommendation to institute a entitlement based system that would ensure supply according to demand.

The current model of home care is not working well. If this ration-based system is retained, the waitlists will only build up again. Substantial overhaul of the home care system with the objective of implementing a needs-based approach is the only way that waiting times for care at home will be cleared in the long term.

An important consideration is that in order to deliver more home care services, there must be enough skilled, competent and qualified workers. **NARI recommends that to facilitate the expansion in the supply of home care and eliminate the waiting list the government work closely with researchers and the aged care sector to comprehensively understand and develop solutions to complex barriers, which include workforce constraints.**

Royal Commission

Recommendation 11: Independent Hospital and Aged Care Pricing Authority (Commissioner Briggs)

The legislation establishing the Independent Hospital Pricing Authority should be amended by 1 July 2021 to rename the Authority as the Independent Hospital and Aged Care Pricing Authority and confer upon it the functions relating to aged care set out in Recommendation 115.

Government Response

Accepted.

The Independent Hospital Pricing Authority will have an expanded role in aged care. This recommendation will need to be progressed in consultation with state and territory governments.

NARI Response

NARI agrees that an independent agency should assume responsibility for determining the costs of providing safe and high-quality aged care services including care at home.

There are a number of potential risks involved in the IHPA assuming this role. While the IHPA has developed and refined its costing model in the hospital care sector, it has no experience in the area of aged care. The development of such expertise is likely to take considerable time. Furthermore, the delivery of aged care service models is far more complex. Older people require and are entitled to choose from a broad range of services and supports that are constantly changing.

Royal Commission	Government Response	NARI Response
Quality Regulation		
Recommendation 24: Star ratings: performance information for people seeking care By 1 July 2022, the Australian Government should develop and publish a system of star ratings based on measurable indicators that allow older people and their families to make meaningful comparisons of the quality and safety performance of services and providers. The star ratings and accompanying material should be published on My Aged Care.	Accepted. Star ratings will be published on My Aged Care by the end of 2022, providing performance information for people seeking residential aged care. Star ratings will allow senior Australians and their families to make meaningful comparisons of the quality and safety performance of services and providers, based on clinical and quality indicators, staffing levels, consumer experience and service compliance ratings. The star ratings will be iteratively enhanced through the incorporation of additional information sources and, subject to the Budget process, expand to in home care by 2024.	NARI welcomes the Government's commitment to implement Star ratings across the aged care sector, and believes that this initiative will help to promote the transparency and quality of services. One of the major problems facing home care consumers is that they are unable to access the information that they require to evaluate the quality of services in order to make informed choices. We urgently need to provide home care consumers with easily accessible information to allow them to make meaningful comparisons between providers. Star ratings may be one effective option to address this problem, however we acknowledge that there will be substantial difficulties in implementing this system across the home care sector. NARI recommends additional research and consultation to develop mechanisms that make it easier for consumers to compare quality and value-for-money across providers.

Royal Commission

Recommendation 94: Greater weight to be attached to the experience of people receiving aged care

From 1 July 2021 onwards, the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commissioner (and from the commencement of a successor body, that body) should:

- periodically publish a report on the experience of people receiving care from an aged care service
- ensure that these reports are informed by interviews with at least 20% of people receiving aged care through the service (or their nominated representative)
- take into account information from people receiving aged care services and their representatives in accreditation assessments and other compliance monitoring processes
- establish channels (including an online mechanism) to allow people receiving aged care services and their families to report their experiences of aged care and the performance of aged care providers, year round.

Government Response

Accepted.

Consumer experience reporting across all residential aged care facilities will be implemented by the end of 2022. Initial consumer experience reporting will be based on a sample of at least 10 per cent of a residential aged care facility's care recipient population and presented through the star ratings by the end of 2022.

Collection and reporting of quality of life and/or consumer experience information will be developed and implemented by the end of 2022, for future integration into star ratings.

NARI Response

NARI recognises the strong need to capture and utilise the experiences of people receiving aged care. This is particularly important in the home care system, where there have been substantial difficulties in capturing and utilising consumer experience information.

The Government should continue efforts to better understand how home care consumer feedback can be collected and used to inform consumer decisions, service delivery and regulatory action.