Catholic Health Australia calls for more aged care packages to reduce wait-times

27 November 2026

Catholic Health Australia has called on the Federal Government to release more Support at Home aged care packages to reduce lengthy wait-times, following the release of the Senate inquiry's interim report.

With some participants left waiting months for care, not-for-profit Catholic providers called for a credible four year plan to match the supply of packages to the needs of older people.

“Given the volume of need and the important role of Support at Home in avoiding hospitalisations and residential aged care, expanding packages must be a priority,” said CHA Director of Aged Care Alex Lynch.

“We commend the government for bringing forward the release of 10,000 packages, but it's clear the sector needs more. An additional 25,000 to 60,000 fully-funded packages per year would clear the existing backlog within a more reasonable period.

“Catholic providers welcome the committee’s recommendation for specific benchmarking around wait times and faster access to care for older Australians.”

CHA also supported the report's recommendations around the assessment tool for access to care, noting the Government has taken steps towards improving the tool.

“One of the most important reforms that can be made to the assessment tool is ensuring that rapid escalation to a human that can override the tool’s decisions is available,” said Mr Lynch.

CHA welcomed the report's call for a review into co-contributions and said the Government should commit to a long-term redesign.

“Aged care funding has not kept pace with the needs of older Australians. At the same time, some older Australians are being charged more for care than they can afford,” said Mr Lynch.

“With aged care costs rising, co-contributions do help the sector provide a safe and quality aged care system. But it’s clear co-contribution settings need to be adjusted to better protect people on low incomes with a safety net while ensuring those who don’t need taxpayer subsidies contribute fairly to their own care.

“The sector also needs to have a genuine, open conversation about who can afford to contribute more to their own care to ensure the system is sustainable and available into the future.”

CHA also called for the care management cap to be lifted from 10 per cent to 15 per cent, after it was halved from 20 per cent under the new program.

“Halving the funding for care management has led to experienced care managers leaving the workforce and left providers carrying costs the program does not cover,” said Mr Lynch.

“Inevitably, this decision has led to less time spent with older Australians on the important coordination work that ensures they receive the most appropriate care for their needs.”

CHA also supported the report's recommendations to abolish the $15,000 lifetime cap on home modifications, review assistive technology arrangements and address delayed discharge from hospital.

“Delayed discharge isn’t a hospital problem or an aged care problem. It’s a care economy problem, “said Mr Lynch.

“There are practical solutions ready to go,” said Mr Lynch. “Dedicated discharge planners, around 600 transition beds, and shared accountability between the Commonwealth and states would allow older Australians to age at home or to access the right care sooner, and free up hospital beds for those who need them.”

You can read CHA’s submission to the Support at Home Program Inquiry here.

About Catholic Health Australia: *Catholic Health Australia (CHA) is Australia’s largest not-for-profit group of health, community and aged care providers. Our members operate 88 hospitals in every state and the Australian Capital Territory, accounting for around 13 per cent of hospital-based healthcare in Australia. This includes about 30 per cent of private hospital beds and about 5 per cent of public hospital care through member hospitals St Vincent’s, Calvary, Mater, St John of God, Cabrini and Mercy. CHA members also operate approximately 12 per cent of Australia’s residential aged care facilities and deliver around 20 per cent of in-home aged care, alongside community services. Twenty-five per cent of our members provide services in regional, rural and remote parts of the country. As not-for-profit providers, CHA members are a dedicated voice for the disadvantaged, advocating for an equitable, compassionate and secure health system that leaves no one behind.*

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