

Thousands affected by at-home care delay

EXCLUSIVE

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More than 16,000 Australians have been forced into nursing homes while waiting for aged-care support in their own homes, with new data revealing the average delay between approval and receiving help has blown out to almost two years.

The Department of Health has revealed for the first time the number of people unable to take advantage of the home-care system — 16,362 in less than two years — as the government grapples with a waiting list that has reached almost 130,000 people since 2017.

Home care is cheaper than residential aged care for taxpayers and consumers, but this month's federal budget included no new funding.

Department of Health assistant secretary Fiona Buffington told the aged-care royal commission in March that it would cost an extra \$2.5 billion every year to bring the average wait time down from one year to three months.

Labor aged-care spokeswoman Julie Collins said the figures underscored the government's "complete mismanagement of the home-care system".

"This system was meant to give older Australians the opportunity to age at home, but the Liberals' mismanagement means more and more older Australians are entering residential care instead of having this choice," Ms Collins said.

In answers provided to a Senate estimates committee, the Health Department also confirmed that some of the 40,000 home-care packages claimed as new by the Coalition were already budgeted for in future growth and brought forward.

The Minister for Aged Care, Ken Wyatt, was approached for comment.