



SOUTHERN CROSS CARE QUEENSLAND -

SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO AGED CARE SERVICE DELIVERY

AUGUST 2025

7 August 2025

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

via email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs,

RE: Implications of the Delay to the Support at Home Program and Lack of Additional Home Care Packages

Southern Cross Care Queensland (SCCQ) welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the inquiry examining the implications of the delayed commencement of the new Support at Home program and the withholding of additional Home Care Packages. We acknowledge the Government's intent to implement these reforms responsibly; however, we are deeply concerned about the practical and immediate impacts this delay is having on older Australians, their families, health systems, and aged care providers across Queensland.

1.0 Impact on Older Australians and Unmet Need

The delay in releasing additional Home Care Packages has left thousands of older Australians without access to the care they need. In Queensland alone, approximately **780 older people** are currently waiting for a residential aged care placement. Many of these individuals could be supported safely and appropriately at home if adequate Home Care Packages were available. This situation contributes to significant unmet needs, declining wellbeing, carer fatigue, and loss of independence for seniors who could otherwise thrive in their own homes.

2.0 Capacity of CHSP to Meet Demand

The Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) plays a vital role as the first step in the aged care system, helping older Australians maintain their independence at home through entry-level services such as domestic assistance. However, demand for these supports, particularly help with basic household tasks, is far outpacing available funding. At SCCQ, we are seeing this first-hand. Every day, we are forced to turn away clients who are seeking help with tasks like cleaning, laundry, and meal preparation. For many, these are the first areas where ageing becomes a barrier, and timely support is critical to preventing further decline and preserving their quality of life at home.



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At the same time, CHSP is not designed to meet the complex clinical or allied health needs of those whose care requirements go beyond this foundational level. SCCQ continues to experience growing demand for more intensive, ongoing services that CHSP simply cannot provide. Without timely access to higher-tier supports such as Home Care Packages, many of our clients face worsening health, increased pressure on carers, and premature entry into residential care. These are outcomes that could be avoided with more responsive and adequately funded community-based options.

3.0 Impact on Providers and Workforce

The uncertainty caused by the pause in new package allocations places strain on aged care providers. SCCQ has the workforce, infrastructure, and systems in place to deliver more home care services today, as we had appropriately planned and prepared for the timelines originally set out for reform. However, we are unable to respond to growing community demand due to a lack of available packages. This misalignment between capacity and availability leads to the underutilisation of skilled staff and rising frustration for families. It also hampers our workforce planning and threatens the long-term sustainability of services, particularly in regional and remote areas where recruitment and retention are already challenging. Valuable, scarce resources are going to waste at a time where there is a clear and known need, and the mechanism is the problem.

4.0 Impact on Health Systems

The consequences of these delays extend well beyond home care. The 780 Queenslanders awaiting residential placement and/or home care packages are currently occupying hospital beds across the public system, blocking access to acute care for others. This gridlock exacerbates pressure on emergency services, emergency departments, primary health services, and GPs, particularly in rural and remote communities. Without timely, sustainable home-based care options, the entire health ecosystem becomes less responsive and more reactive, increasing system costs and reducing quality of care.

5.0 Feasibility of Reducing Wait Times

The Government's goal of reducing Home Care Package wait times to three months by July 2027 is admirable, but increasingly unrealistic unless proactive measures are taken now. These targets may not be achieved without the immediate release of more packages and investment in workforce development.

6.0 Governance and Digital Readiness

SCCQ supports the Government's commitment to digital transformation as a critical enabler of aged care reform. We recognise the complexities of building strong governance, assurance, and accountability frameworks to underpin this transformation. However, we believe that delays in implementation must be

accompanied by interim solutions that safeguard access to care ensuring older Australians are not left unsupported while new systems are developed.

Beyond simply enabling compliance, the digital transformation must deliver meaningful outcomes for both consumers and providers. To achieve this, we strongly advocate for:

- **Reducing administrative red tape** by streamlining data collection, reporting, and compliance obligations across programs and funding streams.
- **Establishing a single source of truth** that provides consistent, real-time information for older Australians, their families, and providers, reducing duplication, confusion, and errors.
- **Enabling secure B2B connectivity** to integrate provider systems with government platforms, facilitating timely data sharing, care coordination, and service delivery without manual intervention.
- Creating **greater transparency across service access, waitlists, funding, and care outcomes** helping consumers make informed decisions and driving public accountability.
- Improving productivity and care quality by **leveraging digital tools to streamline operations, support workforce efficiency, and reduce administrative burden, freeing staff to focus on direct care.**
- Encouraging innovation through a **digitally enabled ecosystem that supports new models of care, flexible funding arrangements, and locally driven service solutions.**

To realise these outcomes, governance must be robust and agile, enabling the system to evolve as technology and user needs change. A digitally mature aged care system should empower older Australians, reduce fragmentation, and lift performance.

We urge the Government to accelerate investment in scalable, interoperable digital infrastructure that creates a more connected, transparent, and person-centred aged care ecosystem.

7.0 Single Assessment System

We support the implementation of a streamlined single assessment system, but it must be sufficiently resourced and ready to connect people with services in real time not in theory alone. Assessment delays or bottlenecks only compound the access problem and increase stress for families.

8.0 Innovation

We also encourage the Government to adopt international best practices by requiring a portion of aged care funding to be allocated to innovation, as is done in countries such as the Netherlands, where providers are mandated to invest 2% of their budget (funding) into innovation and improvement initiatives. This policy has helped drive system-wide transformation by embedding a culture of continuous innovation across aged care organisations.



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In Australia, we face a complex and evolving set of challenges ageing demographics, workforce shortages, rising costs, growing demand, and higher consumer expectations. These are not problems with single-point solutions, and they cannot be resolved by government policy alone. We must shift the paradigm from uncertainty about new models, to shared accountability and responsibility.

Government can begin the work of leading a culture of innovation within the sector, ensuring that creative, practical solutions are developed, trialled, and scaled across diverse communities and care models. Innovation must be seen not as an optional extra, but as a core capability of every provider and a collective commitment across the system.

By embedding innovation requirements within funding agreements, the Government can unlock new ideas, strengthen capability, and help the sector become one that proactively self-designs innovation, improving outcomes for all older Australians. Driving this from Government will provide confidence to providers and to service users, and better support the wider dissemination of best practice. Further, incentivising all providers recognises the many fantastic and individual care delivery models that exist in our country, and encourages all to perform at their best, for the benefit of older Australians.

This is the moment to lead with courage and creativity, placing innovation at the heart of our governance, funding, and reform agenda.

9.0 Dementia Care

We believe there is an urgent need to address the care and support of people living with dementia through a more holistic, person-centred, and innovative lens. The current system remains overly reliant on institutionalised models of care, which do not always reflect the dignity, individuality, or potential of those affected by dementia. At SCCQ, we do not subscribe to the institutionalisation of people with dementia as the default approach. Instead, we advocate for community-based and wellness-oriented models.

We strongly urge the Government to consider the introduction of dementia-specific funding with innovation at its core. This would enable flexible models that are not restricted by overly rigid program guidelines or fee-for-service structures. A more adaptable, outcomes-focused approach will allow providers to develop solutions that reflect the needs and preferences of people with dementia and their carers. Our perspective is not theoretical. We speak as practitioners who have looked globally for the best practice, drawn on lived experience, and seen what is possible when policy enables innovation. Around the world, we see models that respect the person first and offer better quality of life, dignity, and purpose for those living with dementia.

An excellent example of this can be found in South Australia, where Southern Cross Care SA/NT/VIC has developed dementia day respite programs centred on health, wellness, and social connection. These innovative services are making a tangible difference in the lives of people living with dementia and their families. There are many other outstanding examples across Australia and internationally including



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dementia-friendly group homes, social support hubs, and purpose-built environments that demonstrate what is possible when innovation is prioritised. These models move beyond transactional care and instead foster flexibility, creativity, and genuine person-centred support.

As the prevalence of dementia continues to rise over the coming decade, this is no longer a conversation for the future, it is a priority for now.

We urge the Government to act with vision and compassion and to unlock the innovative potential of the sector to support Australians living with dementia to live their best lives.

10.0 Additional Feedback

Around 10 % of SCCQ's clients (138 out of 1402) are either receiving only basic CHSP services while waiting for a Home Care Package or are on a lower-level package that no longer meets their needs. This challenge affects clients across all of our sites. We are deeply concerned for those who are underfunded and struggling to access the level of care they require, with many forced to rely on out-of-pocket-fee-for-service support. The mental health impacts of prolonged waiting, uncertainty, and deterioration are significant, and the situation is only worsening.

We commend the Government's vision and reform agenda but urge immediate, proactive release of additional Home Care Packages to ease pressure across the aged care and health systems, particularly in Queensland. Timely access to home care is not only a matter of equity and wellbeing, it is essential to the sustainability of the entire healthcare ecosystem.

We remain committed to working collaboratively with the Government to ensure that every older Australian can age with dignity, choice, and the support needed at the right time.

Yours sincerely,

Jason Eldering
Chief Executive Officer



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ABOUT SOUTHERN CROSS CARE QLD LTD

Southern Cross Care (SCC), a Catholic not-for-profit organisation, was established over 40 years ago by the Knights of the Southern Cross to address the needs of the ageing population. With a staff of over 1,800, SCC provides compassionate care and support to over 3,000 individuals across 17 residential aged care homes, 8 retirement villages, and home care clients in Queensland and regional New South Wales and Victoria. SCC is dedicated to growing communities where the best lives are lived.

