

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health and Aged Care

Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs Legislation Committee

Inquiry into the Aged Care Bill (Provisions)

03 October 2024

PDR Number: IQ24-000113

Number in hospital beds waiting on allocation to Residential Aged Care

Spoken

Hansard page number: 39

Senator: Maria Kovacic

Question:

Senator KOVACIC: ... Can you give us an indication of how many people are actually currently in hospital beds waiting for allocation to residential aged care?

Mr Lye: Nationally?

Senator KOVACIC: Yes, whatever data you've got. Nationally or state by state—whatever you have there.

Mr Lye: We can certainly come back on notice and give a figure. I do have a figure, but the Commonwealth's collection of it is from 2022-23. States collect their own figures, and the Commonwealth ends up with those figures. What I have is that 1.3 per cent of all public hospital separations of older people occurred where the older person was coded as waiting for aged care services, which may indicate they're part of that group that's commonly called the long-stay older patient cohort.

Senator KOVACIC: Do you have the actual numbers, as opposed to the percentage of patients in public hospitals? Do you have the number of how many older Australians are in hospital beds waiting to enter residential aged care at the moment?

Mr Lye: No, we don't have that data. We have asked for it from the states, but we don't have that data. The states from time to time put figures out. We have asked for that because we're in the middle of a process of working with them to try and see if we can improve the transfer of people out of hospital when they don't have a medical reason to be there.

nswer:

The Commonwealth does not hold 'real-time' data that would indicate the number of older people currently in hospital beds waiting for allocation to residential aged care. Some state and territory governments have this data, which they collect via hospital or 'Local Health District' (LHD) engagement. Significant variation in local practices, care pathways, and use of coding – between and within jurisdictions – makes any accurate national approximation challenging.

The best data held by the Commonwealth indicates in 2022-23, 39,351 of all public hospital separations were attributed to older patients coded as waiting for aged care services (whether residential or home assistance). This number represents 1.3% of hospital separations from older patients in that year.

While this percentage is relatively small, every day an older person remains in hospital when they could be receiving care in a more appropriate setting is a bad outcome – for the patient and the health and aged care systems. The Commonwealth is committed to working with states and territories to address the issue.

The Commonwealth has invested \$882.1 million out of the \$1.2 billion Strengthening Medicare package towards addressing the 'long stay older patient' issue. As part of this, \$610 million has been specifically allocated to states and territories to deliver programs responsive to local needs.

Under this investment, a national evaluation framework, developed in consultation with states and territories, will ensure there is robust evaluation of initiatives identifying how they deliver a reduction of unnecessary presentations to emergency departments or support timely discharge of older patients who are ready to leave hospital.

This and the next National Health Reform Agreement Addendum will lay the foundations for better data sharing through common indicators and definitions to provide an understanding of systemic issues that lead to older people remaining in hospital longer than necessary.