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Submission to the Inquiry on the Implications of the Delay to the Support at Home Program and Withholding of Additional Home Care Packages

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Submitted by: Ravi Krishnamurthy

Position: President, Australian Multicultural Action Network (AMAN)

Focus Communities: Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) populations

Introduction

The Australian Multicultural Action Network (AMAN) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry. Our submission is grounded in the lived experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, particularly older Australians, carers, and community-based service providers who face unique and often overlooked barriers in accessing aged care services.

While the Government's decision to delay the commencement of the Support at Home program until 1 November 2025 offers some time for improvements, we express serious concerns about the withholding of additional Home Care Packages and its disproportionate effects on vulnerable populations. Below, we provide a comprehensive response to each term of reference.

(a) Impact on Older Australians Waiting for Support at Home

Positives:

- The delay allows more time to properly co-design the Support at Home program with older people, carers, providers, and CALD representatives.
- Additional consultation may help tailor care models for diverse populations and better integrate wellness and reablement approaches.

Negatives (especially for CALD communities):

- Long waiting periods are causing **significant stress, social isolation, and declining physical and mental health** among seniors.
 - CALD seniors often face **language and digital literacy barriers** in navigating interim programs, leading to **unmet care needs**.
 - Carers, particularly those from migrant backgrounds, often bear the burden of care without adequate support or recognition, compounding burnout and health risks.
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(b) Capacity of the Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP)

Concerns:

- CHSP providers are already stretched and underfunded. With increased demand due to program delays, **service fragmentation and rationing are inevitable**.
 - Many CHSP providers serving CALD clients operate on **thin margins** and rely on **bilingual workers**, whose availability is inconsistent.
 - Current CHSP funding arrangements do not allow sufficient flexibility for culturally appropriate services or multilingual support.
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(c) Impact on Aged Care Service Providers and Workforce

Implications:

- The uncertainty surrounding funding and reforms is causing **operational instability** for service providers.
 - Workforce shortages are exacerbated by the inability to plan long-term, causing **attrition in experienced bilingual care workers**, who are vital for serving CALD seniors.
 - Providers are reluctant to invest in training and digital infrastructure while the policy landscape remains unsettled.
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(d) Impacts on Hospitals and Health Systems

Health system burden:

- Delayed access to home care leads to **avoidable hospitalisations** due to falls, poor nutrition, and unmanaged chronic conditions.
 - CALD seniors are often **overrepresented in hospital EDs**, due to poor care coordination and communication barriers in community care.
 - Hospitals are facing **bed blockages** as older patients await aged care placements or home care packages that are not forthcoming.
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(e) Feasibility of Reducing Home Care Package Waiting Times by 1 July 2027

Risks to timeline:

- Without the immediate release of more HCPs or interim reforms, the Government's target to reduce waiting times to 3 months is **unlikely to be met**.
 - CALD seniors often experience **double the wait times**, due to systemic and language access barriers.
 - True equity cannot be achieved without **disaggregated data collection** and targeted interventions for at-risk cohorts, including migrants, refugees, and Indigenous elders.
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(f) Governance, Assurance and Accountability of Digital Transformation Projects

Observations:

- The sector welcomes digital transformation; however, **governance gaps and unclear accountability mechanisms** pose serious risks to timely delivery.
 - CALD organisations report not being included in early-stage design or testing of digital tools, leading to **language-inaccessible portals** and exclusionary processes.
 - Transparency in milestone progress and broader community input are lacking.
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(g) Implementation of the Single Assessment System

Positives:

- A unified assessment model could reduce duplication and streamline access, **if properly resourced and culturally responsive**.

Challenges:

- Current assessors lack cultural competency training and **in-language resources**.
 - CALD seniors face **distrust of government systems** and are less likely to engage without the support of **trusted multicultural intermediaries**.
 - Without adequate investment, the system risks replicating existing inequities.
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(h) Other Related Matters

Recommendations from AMAN:

- **Immediately release additional Home Care Packages** to prevent further deterioration in older Australians' wellbeing.
 - Establish a **Culturally Responsive Taskforce** within the Department to advise on implementation for CALD communities.
 - Fund and partner with **ethno-specific providers and community groups** to co-design services, train bilingual workers, and deliver health literacy initiatives.
 - Mandate **multilingual communication standards** across My Aged Care and all digital interfaces.
 - Introduce **interim equity measures** for at-risk populations, such as the CALD Care Navigator model and mobile outreach services.
 - Ensure **consumer voice mechanisms** include representation from diverse ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds.
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Conclusion

The delay to the Support at Home program, combined with a freeze on new Home Care Packages, has compounded inequities already experienced by CALD older Australians. While the additional time could allow for better implementation if used wisely, without urgent action on interim support, resourcing, and inclusivity, the sector—and most importantly, vulnerable seniors—will suffer further.

AMAN strongly urges the Government to prioritise a whole-of-community approach that centres lived experience, addresses cultural and systemic barriers, and ensures that no older Australian is left behind.

Ravi Krishnamurthy

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