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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
By email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Introduction

Juniper Aged Care welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the **inquiry into aged care service delivery**.

As one of Western Australia's largest not-for-profit aged care organisations, and an employer of more than 2,100 people servicing 3,125 clients, Juniper plays a significant role in the local community.

We provide service, support and in-home care to more than 7,000 Western Australians, with a geographic footprint extending from the Great Southern to the Kimberley. The breadth of our footprint in WA is unmatched in the State. In some remote areas of the State, we are the only aged care provider.

Juniper has a commitment to high quality care, accommodation and support services in home and community care, residential aged care, transition care and retirement living communities.

With an ageing population, we recognise the demand for high-quality aged care is set to increase exponentially. By advocating for policy improvements in aged care, we aim to ensure older Western Australians receive the quality care they deserve while building a robust and sustainable workforce to meet the sector's growing needs.

Juniper acknowledges the complexity of the aged care sector and demands upon it. We also acknowledge the significant reforms established under the new Aged Care Act. Despite this, we believe there are three key areas requiring further urgent action to ensure sustainable, equitable high-quality care for older Australians. Drawing upon our history, experience and unique position, we propose to work with governments to progress solutions to the following core issues:

- **Aged care workforce**
- **Home care provision**
- **Residential aged care demand**

The subject of this submission is **home care provision**.

We believe in the voice of older people and their ongoing value and contribution to our community. It is these voices and experiences we have drawn upon while preparing this submission to the inquiry.

Juniper Central

313 Main Street, Balcatta WA 6021 **Postal** PO Box 810, Balcatta WA 6914
Phone (08) 9240 0313 **Fax** (08) 9240 0329 **Email** juniper@juniper.org.au **Web** juniper.org.au
ABN 15 360 992 349



(a) The impact of the delay on older Australians waiting for support at home

Juniper acknowledges the deferral of the Aged Care Act from 1 July to 1 November was a decision that was based upon the scale and complexity of reform required across the aged care system. However, we are deeply concerned about the implications of delaying the new Support at Home program and withholding the release of any additional Home Care Packages.

Analysis of Commonwealth Gen Aged Care data shows Western Australia is already falling alarmingly behind when it comes to supporting its ageing population. The data, released by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, shows that as of 31 March 2025, WA ranked last for the number of home care clients per 1,000 population above the age of 75 for both the Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) and Home Care Packages (HCP) with just 133 and 43 respectively.

WA ranks as the worst in the country for CHSP and sits at equal worst with the ACT for HCP, despite having a greater percentage of population over 65-years-old at approximately 15.6% compared to approximately 13.5%.

As of 31 March 2025, 22,226 people in WA were on a HCP. Between 1 January 2025 and 31 March 2025, the Department released 3,629 HCP in WA. Of those, only 1,855 were new, meaning less than half went to people waiting for a package.

Around Australia, it is anticipated almost 90,000 Australians are now waiting for a HCP – a number that will continue to rise as we head towards 1 November. This means that in WA the number of people waiting for a package, if allocated in proportion to population, could be as high as 9,900.

We also note that the Commonwealth does not publish data on the number of people waiting for an Aged Care Assessment although anecdotal information suggests wait times of up to 18 months for people other than those considered a high priority.

Behind every number is a person – someone’s parent, grandparent, neighbour – waiting for the care and support that allows them to live safely and comfortably in their own home.

Case study #1

Juniper customer Judith¹, 85, underwent titanium ankle replacement surgery in September 2024 and has been waiting for a Level 3 HCP ever since. “It’s been soul destroying – I thought I might as well give up and die,” she told us of her experience waiting for the right level of support she needs.

With limited mobility weighing heavily on her outlook and her future, Judith had to borrow money to buy a scooter in late 2024 as her existing Level 2 Home Care Package funding could not cover the cost.

She said while the scooter had restored some of her independence, she felt she shouldn’t have to owe others to make it happen. “We need the help now – it’s no good in five years’ time, three years’ time,” she said.



Case study #2

Another Juniper customer was approved for a Level 2 HCP in January while at the time undergoing treatment for brain cancer. However, in June he underwent surgery for a hernia which meant he needed to stop his immunotherapy. As a result, his health has deteriorated and he is now immobile.

His wife, who is travelling an hour on the bus and train every day to visit her husband in hospital and then returning to an empty house, told us: "The waitlist especially effects people when they are most vulnerable. When you don't need [the support], you can deal with things more rationally. But when you need it and then they say you have to wait 18 months, it's hard.

"Older people need help now, not in 18 months, because they probably won't be around that long if they are in need of the kind of help that aged care offers."

There are many, many more older Australians sharing similar experiences to these, which is why Juniper has been advocating for a one-off funding boost from the federal government — an estimated \$1 to \$2 billion — to help clear the current waitlist and ensure no one is left behind.

In the interim, we have joined a growing chorus of voices calling for at least 20,000 additional HCPs to soften the impact of the federal government's decision to delay the release of 80,000 HCP from 1 July to 1 November.

Our concern is that older people are going without the care and support services, having to seek funding from friends and family, or simply facing passing away in hospital before receiving services that they have been assessed as being eligible to receive.

These are circumstances that are unacceptable for our society. Worse still, the situation for people waiting for a Home Care Package is far more dire than what was considered by the Royal Commission into Quality and Safety in Aged Care.

(b) the capacity of the Commonwealth Home Support Programme to meet increased demand for support at home prior to 1 November 2025

As indicated earlier in this document, WA has the lowest provision of CHSP services per 1,000 people over the age of 75 in the country.

Furthermore, the number of services delivered (outputs) funded by CHSP in WA has not materially increased since 2018 when the Royal Commission commenced. In that time the population of people over the age of 75 has significantly increased.

As currently funded, the CHSP program in WA is fully subscribed with no capacity to meet increased demand. CHSP is also not designed to meet the needs of people assessed as being eligible for HCP services. CHSP is designed to provide minimal intervention to support the ongoing independence of older people to slow or delay their need for the more intensive HCP and residential care services. Even if further funding was released, the CHSP services would not meet the needs of people waiting for HCP services.



It should be noted that a number of people currently waiting for HCP service may already receive CHSP services. Their needs have increased beyond the capacity of the program.

(c) the impacts on aged care service providers, including on their workforce

Prolonged wait times are placing significant strain on the aged care sector with older Australians experiencing deteriorating health, increased hospitalisations and premature transitions to residential care.

Our aged care homes are already nearing capacity, with many providers struggling to keep up with demand. In Western Australia, there are only 65.5 places available per 1,000 people aged 70 and over.

There's also been a flow-in effect within our workforce, with staff at capacity and families often forced to fill care gaps, often at great personal costs. While we currently have the capacity to handle an increase in Home Care Packages, this opportunity is reducing as a result of the delays in releasing packages due to changes in the way we deploy workers to meet the demand for services in other areas.

Australia's aged care sector has a projected shortfall of at least 110,000 direct care workers by 2030. As demand for services continues to grow, this shortage is quickly becoming one of the biggest challenges facing the aged care sector—one that will impact not just workers, but also the older Australians who rely on care.

We believe the solution lies in a comprehensive, medium-term workforce strategy that takes into account the evolving needs of the sector. This strategy should focus on supporting workers, particularly in regional areas, by improving housing options and infrastructure.

Streamlining the process for recognising overseas qualifications is also crucial to making sure skilled workers can take up positions that match their expertise, ultimately making their roles more fulfilling.

(d) the impacts on hospitals and state and territory health systems

There is evidence to show people in home care situations are more likely to be admitted to hospital than those in residential aged care due to a lack of supports - and yet we are not giving them the supports that will enable them to stay at home.

In turn, WA's hospital system is already under strain, with the state recording its highest-ever ambulance ramping figures in July 2025. Around 250 hospital beds a day in WA are currently being used by people who are eligible for home care or residential care.

Older Western Australians are still facing significant delays – waiting an average of 10 extra days in hospital and 16 additional days for an aged care placement. The situation is considerably worse in regional areas, where a shortage of at-home support and aged care beds mean hospital is the only alternative for older people.

This is not the answer for older Australians eligible for home care or residential care.

Research shows a hospital stay can have a negative impact on the mental and physical health of older people. Hospitals are stressful places – whether that's down to the fear and uncertainty about their health condition or confusion and isolation caused by the hospital setting. The longer the stay, the more damaging it can be for older people.



(e) the feasibility of achieving the Government's target to reduce waiting times for Home Care Packages to 3 months by 1 July 2027, in light of the delay

Juniper is concerned that the delay means wait times will not be reduced to the target of three months by 1 July 2027 for two reasons:

1. The delay in release of new packages when combined with the trickled release of current packages will have already further increased the number of people assessed and waiting for a HCP. It is not beyond the possibility that this number would reach or exceed 100,000 by 1 November making the target impossible to achieve.
2. The release practice of the Department of Health to date has been to divide the allocation of packages annually by 12 and release that amount monthly. To make matters worse the Department is then prioritising those packages only to those currently receiving a package in need of an upgrade over those on the waitlist. If this practice continues, the real impact of the promised packages on the waitlist will fall well short of the current assessed need. This approach realises a budget saving for the department at the cost of people needing services in the community.

(f) the adequacy of the governance, assurance and accountability frameworks supporting the digital transformation projects required to deliver the aged care reforms on time

We are not able to provide commentary in this area as we have not yet been able to experience the outputs from these projects. It should be noted, however, that the aged care system is less than three months from go-live and this is an area where there has been limited evidence of readiness provided by the Commonwealth.

(g) the implementation of the single assessment system and its readiness to support people to access a timely assessment now and beyond 1 November 2025; and

Currently there is no published data to demonstrate that the single assessment system is functioning as intended and that it is assessing people in a timely manner now let alone as it will be required to do when the new Act comes into effect. Without publication of this data, it is difficult to have confidence in the system and its ability to meet the needs of older Australians.

Anecdotal information suggests that the system is struggling, with older people indicating to us that they are being offered a choice of a telehealth consultation in place of an assessment due to the delays in processing applications. This is an inadequate response and fails to recognise the rights of the older person to a full and fair assessment of their needs.

Juniper is calling for greater transparency of the assessment process, including the number of people currently waiting for an assessment and the time from application to assessment so that older people can plan their lives and have confidence that the aged care system will meet the objects of the new Aged Care Act. Our concern is that the current experience of older people is leading to a loss of confidence in the Single Assessment System.

Juniper welcomes the opportunity to discuss our concerns further. If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Russell Bricknell
CEO, Juniper Aged Care