

Older Australians waiting too long for Support at Home, says UnitingCare Australia

UnitingCare Australia has expressed deep concern over recent aged care wait time data and ABC Four Corners reporting, which highlight the reality that older Australians are waiting too long for the support they need to age safely and independently at home.

"The average time an older person is forced to wait to receive support to age at home is troubling at the best of times, and dangerous in the worst of cases," said Tamara Thomas, National Director of UnitingCare Australia.

The latest figures from the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing show older Australians are waiting an average of 10 months for a Support at Home package. Although wait times have declined since the previous report, the reality is around 200,000 older people are ready and waiting for care that enables them to age with dignity at home.

When older Australians are left waiting months for care, their health can deteriorate rapidly. Many are forced into hospital while waiting for support they should be receiving at home, and some die before that care arrives.

"Hospitals are not waiting rooms for aged care. Older Australians should not be pushed into hospital as a last resort, adding pressure to an already overstretched health system," Ms Thomas said.

"Every day, 13 older Australians die while waiting for Support at Home. These are not just statistics – these are real people not receiving the care they need, and for some, the cost of that delay is their life," said Russell Bricknell, CEO of Juniper, a UnitingCare aged care provider in Western Australia.

"The Government promised a more dignified and independent future for older Australians through its aged care reforms, but we are deeply concerned that this is not the reality many people are experiencing right now," Ms Thomas said.

"We have consistently called for more Support at Home packages to meet the needs of older Australians today and the growing demand that will come with Australia's ageing population in the years ahead."

While additional packages are urgently needed, UnitingCare Australia says a broader shift in approach is also required to ensure the system can respond effectively to demand.

"Not only do we need more packages; we need to move beyond delayed, incremental responses and build towards a more productive and responsive aged care system that is adequately resourced to meet community need," Ms Thomas said.

About UnitingCare Australia

UnitingCare Australia is the national body for the Uniting Church's community services network and an agency of the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia. Through advocacy and by strengthening service provision, UnitingCare Australia gives voice to the Uniting Church's commitment to social justice.

The UnitingCare Network is the largest network of social service providers in Australia, delivering 5.8 million interactions annually across 1,600 service locations in urban, rural, and remote communities, with over 55,000 staff and 17,000 volunteers.

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