

MEDIA RELEASE

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New \$537 million aged care package a strong down payment towards improved aged care

The Federal Government's response to the Interim Report of the Royal Commission into Aged Care, including a funding injection of \$537 million, has been applauded by COTA Australia as an important step forward, but a plan to urgently reduce home care waiting times is still missing from the equation.

COTA Australia Chief Executive, Ian Yates, welcomed the raft of new provisions announced today, which tackle the use of chemical restraint in aged care and make a clear commitment to reforming the assessment for home care and the home care program.

"This package is a strong further step in the process of reforming Australia's aged care sector," said Mr Yates.

"Immediate measures to reduce the use of chemical restraints, including training and regulation, are a vital part of the package, addressing a serious violation of human rights with appropriate urgency.

"We also applaud the Government for strengthening its resolve to move younger people with a disability from residential aged care and urge government to implement its commitment in partnership with consumers with lived experienced of these issues.

"The addition of 10,000 new home care packages is also a relief for some of the tens of thousands of older Australians who cannot afford to wait for the care they need."

However, Mr Yates said it was regrettable that the government has not yet developed a plan to reduce home care wait times to a maximum of 60 days over the next 2-3 years.

"Simplifying the process by creating a single body to assess home care applications will help create a streamlined and efficient process for implementing this funding.

"We know that 93%¹ of people waiting on the home care packages waitlist have been approved for Home Support services, but it is unknown how many of these older Australians are actually receiving services, and we know many are not.

"COTA hears from many consumers who have been approved but then find the service providers in their area have closed their doors and are no longer accepting new clients due to funding shortages.

"While 10,000 new mainly high-level home care packages are certainly welcome, waiting times remain completely unacceptable and Australians are suffering and dying as they wait for appropriate care.

"COTA is ready to work with the government on developing a real plan to ensure those waiting times are reduced to no longer than 60 days.

"The government's focus on reforming the sector to work best for consumers is a welcome, overdue and crucial step forward which must continue throughout the Royal Commission process. Continued close consultation with consumers will be necessary to ensure the government's aged care strategy, as it develops, is truly servicing the real needs of the people it is designed to help."

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¹ Department of Health 'Home care packages program data report 1 April – 30 June 2019' page 10. Available at: <https://www.gen-agedcaredata.gov.au/Resources/Reports-and-publications/2019/September/Home-care-packages-program-data-report-1-April-%E2%80%93-30-June-2019>