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Investment in aged care welcome relief for older Australians, but more reform needed

The Federal Government's latest investment in aged care is a welcome step towards delivering the system older Australians and their families deserve, COTA Australia says.

The $3 billion package, outlined by the Minister for Health and Ageing in today's National Press Club address, includes a commitment to increasing the number of aged care beds, boosting the Government's accommodation supplement for people with low means to up to $127 per resident per day, expanding Support at Home clinical care to cover services such as showering, and foreshadows more Support at Home Packages in the budget.

Council on the Ageing (COTA) Australia Acting CEO Corey Irlam said many of the measures announced today respond directly to long-standing concerns raised by older people and advocates.

"Overall, this is a positive and much-needed investment in aged care," Mr Irlam said.

"Expanding clinical care to include everyday supports like showering, committing to more aged care beds and increasing the accommodation supplement are practical changes that will help older people access residential care and afford the support at home services they need to stay safely at home.

"It's encouraging to see the Government listening to the experiences of older Australians and taking steps to address gaps in the system."

However, Mr Irlam cautioned that further reform is needed to ensure the system is fair, sustainable and delivers for everyone who relies on it.

"There is still significant work ahead to make sure aged care consistently meets the needs of older Australians," he said.

"Key to that is ensuring our most vulnerable are not left behind. That includes strong consumer protections, particularly around pricing, and we need to ensure aged care homes are not exclusively taking residents with the greatest capacity to pay.

"There must be strong safeguards in place to ensure everyone can access the care they need, and expectations on providers must be clear and consistently applied across the system.

"All providers benefiting from public funding should be contributing to the care of residents with low means as part of a fair and balanced system.

"Any incentives for refurbishment or new beds must deliver an overall increase in capacity. We have said that incentives should be applied at the provider level, not the site level, to ensure each provider is genuinely building the additional beds the system needs."

Mr Irlam said COTA Australia will also be watching the impact of the private health insurance rebate changes very closely.

"The changes announced to the private health insurance rebate will affect many older Australians. It is understood that more than three million people aged over 65 hold private health insurance, and they are expected to pay around $1 a day more on average, bringing them into line with what other age groups receive today. This comes as part of today's broader reforms to fund improvements in the aged care system.

"For many, this may be manageable, but we must ensure our most vulnerable, including those who rely on private health insurance as a safeguard, are not disproportionately impacted."

Mr Irlam said today's announcements should be seen as an important step forward, but not the end of the reform task.

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“We welcome this investment, especially in a difficult fiscal environment, but the job isn’t done. We need to keep building a system that is accessible, equitable and delivers high-quality care for all older Australians.”

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