

Media release
18 August 2026

More work needed to improve aged care assessments and reduce wait times

Last night's *Four Corners* report put a human face to the experiences of older Australians navigating the reformed aged care system and highlighted the need for further improvements to aged care assessments, wait times and funding, COTA Australia says.

COTA Australia Chief Executive Officer Patricia Sparrow said the report reflected concerns COTA Australia has consistently raised with the Federal Government about the operation of the new system.

"Older Australians should be confident that when they ask for help, the system will respond within a reasonable timeframe and provide the level of funding and support they need," Ms Sparrow said.

"A key part of that is ensuring clinicians' and assessment professionals' judgement and expertise remain central to getting the right assessment outcomes.

"Having an algorithm determine a person's level of care, with limited opportunity for assessors or clinicians to intervene in the outcome, was always likely to create problems."

Ms Sparrow welcomed recent Government changes to strengthen human oversight of aged care assessments but said it would be critical to monitor whether those reforms address the issues older people are experiencing.

"The Federal Government has taken some positive steps and we welcome the strong interest from Parliament in ensuring these concerns are addressed," she said.

"We still need to see how the changes will work in practice, but there must be a clear pathway and timeframe for reassessing outcomes when concerns arise.

"The burden should not fall on older people to prove an assessment is wrong. The system itself must be able to identify and correct problems quickly."

Ms Sparrow said lengthy waits for care remain one of the most significant challenges facing older Australians.

"COTA Australia has long advocated for people to receive the care they need within 30 days, from assessment through to service delivery," she said.

"It's crucial that support is available early. Delays can lead to people deteriorating or reaching crisis point before help arrives.

"No one should have to fight the system or wait months for care they have already been assessed as needing."

Ms Sparrow said stronger protections were needed for people receiving interim Support at Home funding while waiting for their full package allocation.

"Reducing wait times and strengthening safeguards for people receiving interim funding is critical," she said.

"COTA Australia wants legislation to guarantee a maximum length of time a person can remain on an interim package before receiving the full level of support for which they have been approved for.

"There must also be transparency around how many people are on interim packages at any point in time and how long they are waiting to receive their full allocation.

“With a review of the classification system already underway, a key test must be whether each funding level actually purchases the amount and type of care it was designed to deliver at today’s service prices.

“It is not enough to conclude that someone does not need a higher classification without also asking whether their existing classification still buys the care it is supposed to provide.

“Older Australians need confidence that the assessment process identifies those with the greatest needs, responds when circumstances change, and allocates the right level of support,” she said.

“We know the Government is working to reduce waiting times, but too many older Australians are still waiting far too long for essential support.

“Until people are consistently receiving the right care at the right time, there is more work to do.”

Media contact: Tamara Kotoyan, 0430 291 890 or Alana Mew, 0419 929 722