COTA
For older Australians

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Older Australians must be protected from excessive aged care fees: COTA Australia

Stronger safeguards are needed to ensure older Australians in residential aged care aren't being charged excessive fees for everyday services they should already be receiving, COTA Australia says.

The call follows revelations that some aged care residents are being charged significant additional fees for basic items which should already be covered by their aged care fees.

COTA Australia Chief Executive Officer Patricia Sparrow said the charges raised serious concerns about how Higher Everyday Living Fees (HELF) were being applied.

“Charging an older person extra for standard items such as free-to-air TV, wifi, and eggs is simply unreasonable,” Ms Sparrow said.

“Unfortunately, we're hearing more and more stories like these from older Australians and their concerned families.

“Higher Everyday Living Fees were designed to give residents greater choice over optional extras, not to make them pay more for standard, everyday services.

“Older Australians and the Government are already paying for a range of services through the aged care system. Higher Everyday Living Fees should only apply to genuine extras, not standard inclusions like nutritious meals offering variety and choice. Items like free-to-air TV and WIFI should be standard inclusions to meet reasonable community expectations.

“Everyone deserves access to the basics, including good-quality, nutritious food. That shouldn't change just because someone moves into residential aged care.

“Whether providers are misunderstanding the rules or taking advantage of a lack of clarity, the result is the same. Older Australians are being left out of pocket on services they should be receiving, and that needs to be addressed.

“We recognise there are financial pressures across the aged care sector, but passing those costs on to older Australians through additional charges for everyday essentials is not the answer.

“The Government has already taken some action to improve the system, including banning fees on previously free services and requiring refunds where people are overcharged to provide better protections, but it’s clear we need greater clarity, stronger safeguards and proper oversight to ensure residents aren't being charged extra for services that should already be included in their care.”

“Nobody should ever feel pressured to sign an agreement for services they do not want or cannot use, nor should anyone be charged additional for standard items.”

Ms Sparrow said the concerns were another example of implementation problems that needed urgent attention following the introduction of the new Aged Care Act 12 months ago.

“The new Aged Care Act was an important step towards a system that puts older people's rights, needs and choices first, but its implementation has fallen short in too many areas.

“The Government has shown it's willing to listen and respond to concerns, but we need to see these issues resolved quickly.

“Older Australians and their families should be able to enter aged care with confidence that they'll receive the services they're entitled to, without facing unexpected or unreasonable additional costs.”

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