COTA
For older Australians

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Rising Support at Home prices reducing care for older Australians: COTA Australia

The Federal Government must strengthen protections against unreasonable Support at Home pricing and give older Australians greater choice over who delivers their care, COTA Australia says.

The call follows reports of prices for some services, including meals, and cleaning, doubling or even tripling under the new Support at Home system.

COTA Australia Chief Executive Officer Patricia Sparrow said too many older people were seeing the real value of their care packages eroded by rising prices, leaving them unable to access the services they need.

“Older Australians have been dealing with sharp price rises and inconsistent practices since Support at Home began, and many are finding their care packages simply don't stretch as far as they used to.

“Older people should not be forced to reduce or forgo care they've been assessed as needing because of unreasonable prices or because or because they are reliant on a single provider whose arrangements offer limited value for money.”

Ms Sparrow said older people should be able to choose different registered providers for different services, rather than being forced to arrange everything through their package provider, potentially paying more for care they could access directly at a lower cost.

“Older Australians should be able to choose between registered providers rather than being forced to pay more for a service simply because of who holds their care package.

“While there's a 10 per cent cap on administration fees when older people find their own workers, there are no equivalent protections when providers arrange subcontractors.

“That means an older person can pay significantly more for exactly the same service simply because of how it's arranged.

“A 10 per cent cap means little if providers can find ways around it.”

Ms Sparrow welcomed steps by the Government to strengthen consumer protections, including giving the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission the power to order refunds where providers have overcharged.

“It's good that the Government is taking steps to strengthen protections, but it should not be up to older people and their families to identify and challenge unreasonable prices.

“The focus needs to be on preventing unreasonable prices in the first place, and on ensuring people can access the care they have been funded to receive.”

Ms Sparrow said the Federal Government needed to take stronger action to prevent overcharging, including:

- Stronger, enforceable pricing safeguards, including price caps or equivalent effective measures, and a clear definition of what constitutes a reasonable price.
- Delivering on the commitment to allow older Australians to access care through multiple registered providers, which was originally promised to commence from 1 July 2027, with appropriate quality and safety safeguards.
- Proactive monitoring and enforcement of pricing protections by the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission.

Ms Sparrow said Support at Home funding levels also needed to be reviewed to ensure they remained adequate as rising prices reduced the amount of care older people could access.

“When the cost of care goes up but the funding available stays the same, older people inevitably end up receiving less support.

“Older Australians deserve confidence that the funding allocated to their care will translate into the services they need, not be eaten away by excessive costs.”

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