

Office of the Inspector-General of Aged Care
Via Email: royalcommission@igac.gov.au

Submission to the Office of the Inspector-General of Aged Care: 2025 Progress Report on Implementation of Aged Care Royal Commission Recommendations

Lite n' Easy welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Office of the Inspector-General for Aged Care in the preparation of the 2025 Progress Report on Implementation of Aged Care Royal Commission Recommendations.

A healthy diet is critical to health and wellbeing and should be a fundamental priority in aged care. Nutritious meals, and particularly ones that cater to the specific needs of an older person's dietary requirements, are important for prevention and management of numerous chronic illnesses, including Type 2 diabetes, heart disease and certain cancers¹.

Lite n' Easy is supportive of direction of reform and the sector repositioning to a rights-based approach to aged care. Lite n' Easy's service delivery prioritises the needs and preferences of consumers and supports equitable access of care and service for all older Australians.

The ability to cook for oneself is often referenced as a trigger point that may lead to an escalation of aged care service needs. Appropriate service delivery in this space is therefore an important component of supporting the government's plans to build a better, and a more sustainable, aged care sector.

Reform progress has been positive in enacting new frameworks and mechanisms of support. As the Support in Home program is progressed, there is more work that can be done to ensure that a holistic and reasonable system is designed that maintains individual choice for consumers and draws upon the differing strengths of service providers.

Lite n' Easy in Aged Care

Since 1986 Lite n' Easy has provided Australians of all ages access to convenient but, importantly, quality nutritious meals. All meals are developed by our team of accredited practicing dietitians. We pride ourselves in creating great tasting meals, prepared by our expert chefs using freshest ingredients. We prepare these meals daily within our national network of 6 manufacturing facilities, comprised of more than 1,700 team members.

In 2020, Lite n' Easy identified a key barrier to independent living for older Australians was having the access and ability to cook their own quality nutritious meals.

Responding to this need, Lite n' Easy created the My Choice product offering – a bespoke product range for older Australians. This range includes a large variety of meal options, catering for dietary requirements, the personal preferences and the differing but specific nutritional needs of older customers.

Today, Lite n' Easy supports more than 22,000 older Australians every week through the aged care system in metropolitan and regional areas across the country.

Importance of food and meal service as a component of Aged Care

The importance of food provision and service to older Australians was reflected in the Royal Commission. It was highlighted in recommendations as well as commentary, hearings and reports which noted a need to enhance food service in the sector:

- “Imposing appropriate requirements to meet resident nutritional needs and ensure meals are desirable

to eat, having regard to a person's preferences and religious and cultural considerations.”
(Recommendation 19:1b)

- “Social supports ... to improve social inclusion and community participation for the person's long-term health and wellbeing ... including ... delivered meals.”
(Vol. 3A, p.164, Summary of the New Aged Care System)
- “The System Governor should be in a position to commence payment of subsidies for service provision within a new care at home category by 1 July 2024 ... [with] ... living supports, including cleaning, laundry, preparation of meals ...”
(Recommendation 35)
- “Applicants for approval to provide Home Care Packages must be able to demonstrate capability across all four Home Care Package levels ‘to maintain continuity of care for the consumer’. This is the case even if they are only intending to provide entry-level services such as delivering meals or gardening.”
(Vol. 3B, p.493)
- “By 1 July 2024, the Australian Government should pay subsidies for service provision within the care at home category through a new funding model that takes the form of an individualised budget or case mix classification. ... [with] ... preparation of meals.”
(Recommendation 118)

In recognition of the important role the appropriate management of food preparation and delivery plays in supporting older Australians to stay healthily at home for longer, future reform must protect and enhance food and meals support as a component of aged care.

Progress to date

Major reform to date has pursued an important agenda which is focused on self-directed and decided care, dignity of life and management of risk. These components contribute to a repositioning of a system in which older Australians have greater control over the services they are provided.

This included the implementation of the *Aged Care Act 2024*, which sought to “empower older people to exercise their rights when accessing, or seeking to access, Government-funded aged care services” and “support them to live active, self-determined and meaningful lives as they age.” This aligns with Lite n' Easy's core principles as an aged care provider.

While Lite n' Easy's service delivery is offered through the Commonwealth Home Support Package, we have remained closely engaged with the reforms implemented to date and will continue to do so. Noting that there is still work to be done in determining the scope and delivery of the Support at Home Program, Lite n' Easy looks forward to contributing to that process.

In 2024, Lite n' Easy surveyed over 4,500 of our Home Care Package users, determining that:

- Nearly 4 in 5 people rated Lite n' Easy's variety of meals at 8 out of 10 or higher.
- 6 out of 7 people rated the overall experience of Lite n' Easy as 8 out of 10 or above.
- 56% of survey respondents said the main reason for using Lite n' Easy was for healthy convenience.
- 39% of survey respondents said they use Lite n' Easy for more independence.

- Range of meals and quality were the reasons users chose to use Lite n' Easy over other providers.
- More than half of users choose to phone the Lite n' Easy service to order their meals directly rather than using the website.

The relevant insights from these survey results provide the frame through which ongoing reform should be pursued:

- Choice and independence are key. Individuals want to exercise their independence when accessing support, they value the ability to exercise choice in the service they use, the options available to them within that service, and the way they engage with that service.
- The value of connection: highlighting the way in which reform should contemplate service bundling to deliver not only enhanced health, but enhanced wellbeing benefits to older Australians.

Ongoing reform should support improvements in service, greater benefits to consumers

With regards to food and meals, as reform continues, appropriate support must be scoped in such a way to protect and enhance the benefits that older Australians are deriving from services such as Lite n' Easy, namely high-quality and nutritional food that meets their needs and requirements. This includes:

- Meal delivery must meet nutritional standards, to ensure that older Australians are being provided with healthy foods that contribute to their health and wellbeing.
- Diversity in food types and preferences should be accommodated. It is critical that food services factor in a wide range of palates, use of traditional ingredients and multicultural preferences, to ensure that older Australians can access food that reflects their preferences.
- Pricing should reflect the nutritional makeup of the product, preferencing higher quality, higher protein options with accommodations to support providers that can offer tailored meal servicing to older Australians that have specific dietary needs due to health conditions.
- Need for an ongoing focus on how service levels or government protects and provides for services operating in thin markets, in particular regional, rural and remote Australia. This should accommodate for the difficulty and time requirements associated with delivering to the more challenged areas. Equitable access is one of the underpinnings of the rights-based legislative framework. Therefore, reform must ensure that high-quality services can be delivered to individuals regardless of where they are based. This is also particularly relevant as food security is more strained in more remote communities.

There also remains opportunity to bundle care and support together, for example through the integration of individual engagement into food delivery. A 'meal-plus' option would contribute to an additional means by which loneliness can be addressed; an issue that requires a whole sector approach.

Social interactions should be embedded in all aspects of care and service for older Australia, including meal delivery service, as a natural extension of the care economy to ensure that we can efficiently and effectively deliver care to those who need it.

Partnership to deliver improved services

Lite n' Easy would also take this opportunity to emphasise the benefit in collaboration in the delivery of ongoing aged care reform. Partnership enhances not only individual right and choices of those accessing the

service, but the efficiency and effectiveness in delivery for providers and the government.

Case study: Lite n' Easy and Monash City Council Meals on Wheels

Lite n' Easy has worked with Monash City Council since 2019, providing for more than 1,600 individual clients. Council orders meals for clients via the Lite n' Easy portal 3 times per week, including a Main, Soup and Dessert. Lite n' Easy then pick and packs meals by client and by delivery round, and delivers to Monash Council 3 times per week. Volunteers and staff then deliver direct to clients.

Case study: Lite n' Easy and Newcastle / Whitehorse City Council Meals on Wheels

Lite n' Easy delivers in bulk cartons to two locations across two states - Newcastle NSW and Whitehorse City Council, VIC. The Councils order carton quantity frozen meals including Soup, Main Meal (+Fresh) and Dessert. Lite n' Easy provides meals in bulk (along with other vendors, for example Meals on Wheels' hot food service) and then volunteers/staff pack and pick Lite n' Easy product and other product. This is then delivered by volunteers/staff to those accessing the service.

Case study: Lite n' Easy and Benetas (Victoria)

Benetas provides aged care support via residential care, community packaged care, in-home care, primary health care, respite services, affordable housing, and retirement living to the aged. Benetas utilises Lite n' Easy to support people accessing its services. Benetas will place orders via an online portal. Lite n' Easy will then deliver directly to customers once per week. Part of this service is an included welfare check by the Lite n' Easy delivery partner, to provide hand-in-hand support for the person accessing the service.

Conclusion

As reform progresses, regular reference to the findings of the Royal Commissions and the stated preferences of those older people engaging with the system must be prioritised to ensure that momentum continues in the right direction. We support the Office of the Inspector-General and their important work in focusing on the impact of reform achieving the paradigm shift the Royal Commission called for.

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