

**Seniors Rights Service
submission to Office of
Inspector-General Aged Care
on the
2025 progress report on the
implementation of
Royal Commission recommendations**

About Seniors Rights Service

Seniors Rights Service supports older people to know their rights and be empowered to assert these rights by providing free specialist legal services, aged care advocacy and information across the breadth of NSW. We are a not for profit community organisation that is independent of government and has been supporting older people for over 37 years.

Our Vision

A society that respects and upholds the rights of older people.

Our Purpose

The purpose of Seniors Rights Service is to raise awareness and empower older people to activate, uphold, extend and defend their individual rights. We foster communities to respect and value seniors and their rights. We achieve our purpose by providing accessible and confidential legal services, aged care advocacy and information.

Our Service Principles In all of its endeavours, Seniors Rights Service will:

- empower older people as rights holders and active contributors to society
- provide high quality, appropriate and timely services
- provide equitable access to services for seniors, regardless of race, nationality or ethnic origin, gender, marital status, disability, religion, political beliefs, sexual orientation or any other characteristic
- support capacity development of staff to ensure they can deliver high quality services
- collaborate with other organisations in pursuit of common goals
- work with broader civil society to foster respect for older members of society and their individual rights

Our Priority Populations Seniors Rights Service prioritises engagement with older people who:

- are disadvantaged and vulnerable
- are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Peoples
- reside in regional, rural and remote locations
- are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer or other

Seniors Rights Service welcomes the invitation to provide a submission on the 2025 progress report on the Australian Government's implementation of the Aged Care Royal Commission recommendations. Using the guiding questions provided, Seniors Rights Service requested feedback and insight from team members and the following is a summary of that internal consultation.

To date, the implementation of the Royal Commission's recommendations has shown some progress, particularly in areas like improving staffing ratios and the introduction of the Aged Care Quality Standards. However, the pace has been slow, and there has been inconsistency in how reforms are rolled out across different regions and service providers. Some reforms, like the new home care packages and increased funding, are positive steps, but gaps in the following areas to name a few remain in need of reform and support

- consistent training and support for frontline workers on issues that affect older people as well as an overview of rights and responsibilities
- continued long wait times
- lack of services or options in rural, regional and remote areas
- varying levels of service quality
- aged care landscape and services available is complex and confusing

A clear, well-supported and realistic timeline that works with partners and stakeholders to meet full implementation is essential to ensure that progress continues and is sustained as well as priority areas receive support and funding as a matter of urgency to go beyond surface level reform.

For reforms and changes that have come into effect, the support, information, and resources available has been insufficient in many cases or caused further confusion due to lack of information, gaps in information or poor communication, often an older person must navigate different sources for information and this can get complicated. While progress in this area has been made, the pace of new information is vast when it occurs and it can be difficult to stay across and see how it all interconnects from an older person and their supports perspective. Having specialist services and supports to aid older people, including providers themselves stepping up in this areas is essential when transitioning to a new system and approach and requires:

- Comprehensive training and support for workers in the sector tailored to their role specifically
 - This must not just be a focus for providers and the community sector but for those in government also
- Clear communication provided to older people and their support network that has been developed with them to ensure maximum impact

- All resources must accommodate different community needs and be available in multiple languages.
- Finance is an area that lacks sufficient resources and should be a focus area moving forward
- One step access to information would be beneficial – this should be co-designed with older people

Regarding meeting individual needs of ALL older people in their diversity the reforms have made strides in promoting inclusivity, but they still fall short in meeting the diverse needs of all older people, particularly those from marginalized or vulnerable groups, such as First Nations people, people with disabilities and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. For those in rural and regional areas services like care finders often do not have capacity to support complex cases which most with any diversity fall into, meaning those most in need of support are further marginalised by systems. More specific focus on diverse groups is absolutely necessary to ensure equitable access to care and some of the following items are essential to achieving that

- Further investment in addressing existing and future disparities – the solutions are often simple and must start from a Human Rights Based Approach
- Better cultural competency and tailored support for individuals with different needs
- Increased training
- Digital literacy support and access to technology
- Flexible approaches that accommodate lived realities of diverse people that work to the same principles but are flexible to ensure the same outcomes for all

Language barriers and cognitive impairments continue to make it difficult for many individuals to understand important information. Those who struggle with language or cognitive challenges may find it hard to access the support they need or make informed decisions about aged care services. These barriers limit the effectiveness of the systems designed to help, leaving some individuals at a disadvantage when trying to understand their options or access timely care. Addressing these areas as a priority throughout the implementation of the Royal Commission's recommendations is essential.

New systems have not significantly improved older peoples understanding or timely access to aged care services. The star ratings for aged care facilities lack transparency and often do not provide a clear or accurate picture of what is actually happening in some homes. As a result, they fail to improve consumer understanding and make it harder for older people and their families to make informed decisions about care options. Star ratings is also only relevant if you have the availability of choice, if you are in a rural, regional or remote area and access to care is limited to very few

services or only one, such star rating are irrelevant if you are to stay in your community or close by. For better effectiveness real choice and availability is key for all along with further transparency to aid informed choice.

Similarly, Care Finders are more often at capacity and unable to support all vulnerable older people who need assistance. This service is stretched thin, leaving many without the help they need to navigate the aged care system. To address this,

- Care Finder program needs to be extended and where there are gaps find localised solutions to bridge this
- Additional funding should be provided for more independent navigators that sit aside from providers
- Find solutions for those who do not meet Care Finder eligibility but still require guidance and support in accessing aged care services

The current pinch points and delays in systems, rules and gaps are some of the following:

- Significant delays in accessing care, particularly in home care packages and aged care assessments. This delay leaves older people in limbo, struggling without the support they need, and can result in a decline in their health or well-being.
- Complexity of the system often results in older people and their families being overwhelmed or confused about how to access services or what is available
- Gaps in information around eligibility for different services, particularly for those who may not meet certain criteria for funding or support. Older people and their families are often left without clear, concise information about their rights, entitlements, or the services available to them. For example, people may not know how to appeal decisions, or they might not understand the full scope of assistance available under programs like Home Care Packages or aged care rights. Older Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds often face additional barriers in understanding their rights and accessing aged care services due to language difficulties and cultural differences. Increased funding to ensure
 - a comprehensive information campaign with knowledge translation to aid understanding
 - culturally appropriate and sensitive information tailored to specific community groups
 - tailored support and information materials for older people with cognitive impairments as they face particular challenges
- Digital literacy remains a significant challenge, and those without access to technology or those who struggle to navigate it can miss out on crucial information and services. There needs to be a greater emphasis on human-centered support alongside technological advancements to bridge this gap. The introduction of the single assessment system aimed to

streamline access to services, but in practice, it has not alleviated delays or simplified the process. The red tape and bureaucratic hurdles often lead to confusion for older people, especially when they have to navigate multiple agencies or organisations for their needs while navigating technology. Older people often get help from their support network to navigate these online systems, and even for those who have digital literacy and use different systems for work and study find it confusing and hard to use these online systems. Working with older people to create online systems that aid them as well as increasing their digital knowledge is essential.

To conclude, one of the strengths of progress made to date is the growing emphasis on rights-based advocacy and the role of services like Seniors Rights Service in helping older people navigate disputes and understand their rights. When we take a tailored, empathetic approach that focuses on the individual's specific needs, it helps older people feel heard and supported. Taking the time to really understand their situation and build trust is key to successful outcomes. This is especially critical for individuals in vulnerable situations such as those experiencing elder abuse or financial exploitation. Regular education sessions and/or one-on-one consultations with older people help them better understand their rights and how to navigate the system. When older people are informed, they can make empowered decisions about their care.