

28 June 2024

Office of the Inspector-General of Aged Care
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Carers NSW welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inspector General of Aged Care (the Inspector General) on the administration of My Aged Care. Carers NSW commends the Australian Government on its ongoing work to improve access to aged care services and supports for people who are ageing and their carers. However, this submission will highlight ongoing barriers and challenges accessing aged care assessments and services through My Aged Care and the need to improve access to timely, comprehensive assessments through My Aged Care as the gateway to aged care services and supports.

Carers NSW is the peak non-government organisation for carers in New South Wales (NSW). A carer is any individual who provides care and support to a family member or friend who has a disability, mental illness, drug and/or alcohol dependency, chronic condition, terminal illness or who is frail. Carers NSW is part of the National Carer Network and a member of Carers Australia. Our vision is an Australia that values and supports all carers, and our goals are to:

- Be a leading carer organisation in which carers have confidence
- Actively promote carer recognition and support
- Actively support carers to navigate a changing service landscape that will be characterised by ongoing policy reform
- Promote connected community experiences and opportunities for carers that are inclusive of diverse carer groups
- Lead and advocate for carer-specific and carer-inclusive policy making, research and service delivery
- Continue to be a quality-driven, responsive and carer-focused organisation.

Thank you for accepting our submission. For further information, please contact Melissa Docker, Senior Policy and Development Officer, at melissad@carersnsw.org.au or by calling (02) 9280 4744.

Yours sincerely,



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CEO
Carers NSW

Introduction

Carers NSW thanks the Inspector General for the opportunity to provide feedback on the administration of My Aged Care. Streamlined and equitable access to the aged care system through assessments and My Aged Care is key to ensuring optimal outcomes for people who are ageing and their carers. Inability to access aged care services that are timely and adequate is likely to jeopardise the ongoing sustainability of informal caring arrangements and subsequently, the health and wellbeing of people who are ageing and their carers. Carers NSW acknowledges the work of the Australian Government to improve access to aged care services through the introduction of Aged Care Specialist Officers

Carers NSW believes in the importance of autonomy and self-determination for people who are ageing and is supportive of policy and practice that facilitates their independence and meaningful participation in community life. Carers NSW recognises that not all people who are ageing receive informal support or would identify as having a 'carer'. However, the 2018 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC) found that of the approximate 1.7 million people who are ageing who require assistance with at least one everyday activity, 70% (approximately 1.2 million) reported receiving some assistance with everyday activities from informal supports, most commonly their spouse who is often ageing themselves.¹

This submission draws on Carers NSW research, delivery of CHSP Sector Support and Development and experience as the lead provider of Carer Gateway services in the Hunter, New England, Central Coast and North Coast regions of NSW. The submission will highlight ongoing barriers and delays to accessing aged care assessments, most notable ACAT assessments and the impacts of this on the sustainability of informal caring arrangements. The submission will also highlight ongoing limited awareness of My Aged Care within the community, as the entry point to My Aged Care and aged care assessments. A recent Carers NSW consultation briefing (see attached) will also provide insights into the experiences of carers accessing aged care services through My Aged Care more broadly, and the ongoing need to streamline and simplify access to aged care services and supports through My Aged Care.

Access to timely assessments

Carers NSW has heard from carers and services providers that significant delays on Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT) assessments, such as delays on ACAT assessments of up to 4 months in regional and rural areas, have significantly impacted on the ability of people who are ageing and their carers to access essential aged care services when they need them. The Carers NSW 2022 National Carer Survey² found that of respondents caring for someone accessing aged care services, approximately one in three (33.5%, n=2,275) reported there was a long waiting period to get assessed. Carers and service providers have also reported significant delays on accessing new assessments or reassessment where the condition of the person who is ageing changes, resulting in increased caring needs. In some instances, where there have been delays on ACAT assessments, carers have reported that they have instead been referred to Regional Assessment Services (RAS) assessments, which are unable to assess them for or refer them to the level of support needed.

Where an assessment or reassessment cannot be accessed in a timely manner, additional strain is often placed on carers to provide unsustainable levels of care, or other service systems, such as Carer Gateway, may be over relied on to fill service gaps. Significant delays that result in ongoing high unmet needs may result in premature placement in residential aged care as carers are unable to continue to

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2019), *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of findings, 2018*, New South Wales Tables, Canberra.

² Carers NSW (2023) *2022 National Carer Survey, unpublished data*.

provide high levels of complex care without adequate formal support or opportunities to take breaks from the caring role.

Responses to the 2022 National Carer Survey:

- *“Aged care service assessments need to be within a couple of weeks of request not 4 months. I eventually rang every day for 10 days before being given an ACAT. It was all then too late and too little to support my Mum in her house. My brother and I did her care for 4 months.”*
- *“Been waiting more than three weeks for the ACAT team to arrange an ACAT assessment for my mother as she will need to move into care.”*
- *“My wife's gerontologist recommended that my wife's needs be re-assessed by ACAT. When I rang them, a somewhat aggressive woman told me that unless her condition had worsened 'dramatically', they were too busy. I did not proceed.”*
- *“Need to ensure aged care assessments are done quicker. It's so disturbing to wait when supports and funding are needed straight away. I lost lots of money because I had to stop working.”*
- *“Not responsive to increased needs i.e.. hard to get priority / reassessment for higher level package when condition changed and higher needs resulted.”*
- *“No service offered to me even though I am 77 and have Back problems which my ability to perform household activities. Husbands condition is incurable and progressive with no treatment. Referred on to ACAT several times in the last 2 years to obtain a higher package, always had a reason why they wouldn't come, later I discovered that many were not true.”*

Carers NSW acknowledges the ongoing intention throughout aged care reforms to transition to a new streamlined single assessment model, however, has concerns that ongoing delays for assessments may limit the effectiveness of this new approach. Carers NSW believes that clear timelines for the provision of assessments, such as within 28 days, must be established to ensure timeliness and accountability and provide clear expectations and avenues for redress for carers and the people they care for where delays occur. Additionally, Carers NSW believes that greater communication with people who are ageing and their carers where there are delays would support improved service experiences and enable identification of the need for prioritisation or urgency where caring arrangements are having a significant negative impact on carers, and are likely unsustainable.

Improving access to aged care assessments and services through My Aged Care

While many carers report to Carers NSW delays with accessing assessments, other carers report to Carers NSW that are not even aware of, or do not feel confident accessing My Aged Care to access an assessment or subsequent services and supports. Carers NSW conducted a consultation with carers in 2022 to better understand their experiences and needs when accessing My Aged Care (see attached). Overwhelmingly, carers reported that My Aged Care was confusing and challenging to navigate. Through the delivery of Carer Gateway services and Carers NSW Navigating My Aged Care training, Carers NSW has observed an ongoing low awareness of and confidence engaging with My Aged Care by carers.

Carers NSW recognises the work of the Australian Government to improve awareness of, and streamline pathways to aged care services and supports. This includes the introduction of Aged Care Specialist Officers and Care Finders, and improved integration between My Aged Care and Carer Gateway. However, based on our ongoing engagement with carers, Carers NSW believes that there remains opportunities to streamline and simplify access to and navigation of the aged care system, especially in relation to supporting carers to better understand the support available to them and the person they care for. Improving access to aged care services to enable the timely provision of formal supports is likely to support the optimal wellbeing of carers and the person they care for and reduce strain on the aged care system into the future.

Conclusion

Carers NSW thanks the Inspector General for the opportunity to provide feedback on this matter. Improving awareness of and access to My Aged Care, as well as ensuring timely and equitable access to aged care assessments are vital in supporting the health and wellbeing of people who are ageing and their carers. Ensuring timely access to adequate aged care support, especially when needs change, will ensure the ongoing sustainability of caring arrangements and support people who are ageing to remain in their home and communities where they prefer.