

Office of the Inspector-General of Aged Care,

30 May 2024

Dear Acting Inspector-General,

I am writing to bring your attention to the processes currently in place for older people to access help through My Aged Care.

My husband and I are both on a Commonwealth Home Support Program [CHSP] package, and while I am not seeking help with any particular situation, I will quote some personal experiences which, I believe, clearly demonstrate that the system is very flawed.

With close observation and many discussions with my age peers, it is indisputable that the largest proportion of funding for the aged is being used for administration, advice and assessing.

For the sake of brevity, I will just address the '*assessment*' process. As you are aware, that to access any service, every client needs to be assessed. But are you also aware that following the assessments there is, in the majority of cases, no help to be had?

Example 1.

In 2018, I first contacted M.A.C. to seek some domestic support and maybe a little 'outside/garden' help for my husband and myself. In due course [some weeks] we were assessed - well I thought we were, I later discovered that my husband had to be assessed separately! However, *my* domestic assistance was put into place, but shortly after, when I was in hospital, we discovered he was not eligible for the service - he too needed to be assessed. So back to M.A.C. and after the required waiting period, [yes, another assessor came to our house and spent two hours going through the exact same process!!]. My husband was subsequently issued an approval number for some 'home maintenance assistance'. I then proceeded to phone the listed eight providers that service our area, all with the same response 'no vacancies' and they don't keep a waiting list - 'just keep phoning!' When I eventually found a place that could provide a couple of hours help - I discovered that my husband's approval number had expired - he would need to be reassessed.

At that point we gave up, but without stating the obvious, we are getting older and late last year I felt he really needed a bit of assistance. So, back to M.A.C. and onto the waiting list for another assessment. This happened November 2023 and we were issued new approval numbers [I won't go into the astonishing information about previous assessments that came to light from that interview - but this just added to my growing misgivings about the whole process]. Again, I phoned the eight listed agencies, all with the same response - 'no vacancies' - just keep phoning!' I am sure you can appreciate the frustration and absurdity of that.

### Example 2.

March 2024, following several falls and outlaying many, many dollars for private physiotherapy, I happened to 'pick up' that I could apply for allied health support. I approached M.A.C. hoping to obtain access to a falls-prevention unit and/or some help with physiotherapy. Of course, I needed to be assessed and 6/7 weeks later, I was issued, by phone, the required approval number. Bearing in mind I had a two-hour interview in my home for domestic assistance, I was mystified how my need for physiotherapy could be assessed over the phone, moreover why it would take over six weeks to make a phone call! However, I was issued an approval number and the agency I was referred to said they could provide the service, then added if it was going to be longer than three months, they would send me a letter! That would be 5/6 months after I first asked for help. The catch - I understand that the approval number has an expiry date of three months. I guess at that time I will again be assessed - do I then go back to the bottom of the waiting list? At time of writing, I am still on some sort of endless merry-go-round re a Falls Prevention Unit. I keep being referred on to *somewhere else*, - the last I heard was that I need to consult a geriatrician - which I can only assume is for further assessment.

I guess I will just keep waiting.

### Example 3

October 2023, following a '*very near miss*,' a senior relative applied to M.A.C. for assistance to have safety rails installed in her bathroom. In due course she was assessed and, in a reasonable time frame, an occupational therapist gave advice. Of course, she is still waiting for the work to be carried out - seven months and counting. This particular scenario seems too ludicrous to include, but I will and I swear it is true. Same relative learned that her local council offered \$6 bus trips to seniors within their council area - she applied, but was told, *she had to be assessed*, even though she had been assessed late 2023 - no, she needed another assessment. Eventually this was done and she returned to the council to join the list for the bus trip only to be told - *too late now, it's all full-up*, try again next year. Of course, the approval will probably have expired so she will need to be re-assessed.

I think these few examples (I can provide plenty more) clearly demonstrate the huge failings in just the assessment sector of the whole system. A system, which to me, seems to be more about keeping the assessors and administrators in employment. It is certainly not meeting the needs of aged people.

The most basic of questions is, why are we constantly assessed for

services that are not available? At the end of one assessment, I commented that now I had the magic approval number how would I find anyone to honour it. The assessor agreed, there is no help available - they [admin, assessors, advisers] all know it, but continue with the 'futile' assessments.

I suggest we all do not pretend help is available, do not have us waiting and phoning and being assessed, all for no result. Surely this is the definition of a self-fulfilling organisation?

The amount that has been spent on our endless and fruitless assessments would be more productive in us finding our own home maintenance or allied assistance.

There seems to be adequate funding for 'talk' - *admin, assessment, advice*, but not much for the core business of helping the aged stay in their homes.

If the admin processes were streamlined [and they certainly can be] and the whole assessment arrangement scrapped and reworked, then there might be more money available to pay actual workers a better wage, therefore attracting more to the work force.

Finally, I would like to add that the whole three tiers of the system is so complex to navigate, most of the people I have spoken with have no idea at all how it works - OK if you have a well-informed family member or reliable advocate. I guess if you don't then bad luck for you!

I am not naïve enough to expect overnight change, but I do hope that by raising just some of the issues maybe there can be some improvement to this unwieldy and very *user-unfriendly* system.

Respectfully,  
Janet Trigg  
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