

My Aged Care Review: Summary Report

Why this review?

The purpose of the review is to consider whether My Aged Care, as the single-entry point to the aged care system, is fit-for-purpose in facilitating timely access to aged care services and supports for all older people in Australia, regardless of their location, background and life experiences.

Following the establishment of the Office of the Inspector-General of Aged Care (the Office) in October 2023, the former Acting Inspector-General undertook an extensive consultation process to determine the priority issues for the Office's inaugural review. Following this consultation, it was determined in March 2024 that a key concern for many stakeholders was the persistent and well-known issues with My Aged Care which were seen to be delaying, complicating and ultimately inhibiting access to the aged care system for many older people in Australia.

The resulting worry was that if My Aged Care was not facilitating access to the aged care system for some people, then these same people would also be prevented from accessing the aged care and services and supports that they need. This could compromise their ability to live independently, putting them at significant risk of further physical and cognitive decline.

This review therefore centres on the questions: *Is the front door to aged care open to everyone? Is it easy to find, easy to use, fair and equitable?* And crucially: *Does it reflect the rights and dignity now enshrined in the new Aged Care Act 2024 ('new Act')*?

This review is not about fault-finding or admiring the problem. The government's new Act sets a powerful new standard and demands we reshape the system and deliver rights. It affirms that older people have the right to make decisions about their own lives, to be heard, to be safe, and to be respected. But rights are only meaningful if people can access the system that upholds them. If the front door is too complex, too narrow, or too exclusive, then the system fails before care even begins.

A brief guide to the report

The report is set out in three main sections with a range of supplementary material and appendices.

The supplementary material includes the formal response from the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing (the department) to the review recommendations. The response outlines each of the recommendations that have been accepted or accepted in-principle by the department and notes those recommendations for which it considers acceptance to be constrained by decisions yet to be made by the Australian Government or beyond its authority.

Part 1: Review rationale and background

This section sets out the context in which the review was commenced and the process followed. It also provides background information on the introduction and administration of My Aged Care.



Part 2: Analysis, findings and recommendations

This is the main body of the report. It presents evidence and analysis across four major themes relating to the administration of My Aged Care:

1. Awareness
2. System complexity
3. Workforce
4. Equity

It also details the Inspector-General's findings and related recommendations.

Part 3: The case for change

This section concludes the review with final observations and a call to action from the Inspector-General. This section also includes the final recommendation.

The evidence base

In conducting the review, the Office considered more than 1100 documents from the department and its My Aged Care delivery partners: Liquid Interactive, Healthdirect Australia and Services Australia. These documents included a broad range of reports, reviews, evaluations, audits, strategies, contracts, scripts, training materials, briefs and ministerial correspondence. In addition, approximately 36 submissions were received from stakeholders, aged care organisations, peak bodies, and members of the public.

The Office also engaged directly with several key stakeholders and conducted a site visit at the main My Aged Care contact centre in Wollongong, New South Wales. Analysis was further informed by research and literature from a range of government bodies, scholars and advocacy groups.

Hearing directly from people who have engaged with the My Aged Care system from personal and professional standpoints helped to provide additional depth to the review through incorporating the perspective of those with lived experience.

Key findings

The accessibility of My Aged Care is tantamount to exercising the right to aged care. However, based on the evidence received, it is clear that My Aged Care does not enable all older persons in Australia to navigate to, and initiate, the assessment process required for entry to the aged care system in a timely manner. This lack of timely access is often further compounded by a person's location, health requirements, cultural background, identity or prior knowledge of the system, despite the equity of access principles which underpin the system.

Over the course of the review consistent themes emerged around low awareness, poor accessibility and inequitable service provision. It should be noted that many of these issues have plagued My Aged Care since its inception in 2013 and have been documented extensively in two of the most important bodies of work in Australian aged care policy in recent years, the 2017 *Legislated Review of Aged Care* and the reports of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety delivered in



2019 and 2021. However, this is the first review of its kind which has focussed solely on examining My Aged Care's role as the single-entry point to the aged care system.

A lack of awareness

Evidence to the review demonstrated that many people in Australia do not understand the aged care system or the role of My Aged Care. Many people are not informed of what they need to do to access the system and often do not engage with it until they are at a crisis point. The lack of sufficient and effective promotion of My Aged Care can result in delayed access to essential aged care services which can contribute to sub-optimal health and social outcomes for older people.

A complex and difficult system

The review found that My Aged Care remains onerously complex to navigate and is not appropriately tailored to the needs of the target population. My Aged Care is primarily centred around a website and telephone contact centre which embodies a level of complexity that creates a significant barrier to timely and effective access. Serious concerns exist regarding the heavy reliance on digital technology and connectedness, a lack of accurate and easy to understand information, and the overall accessibility of the My Aged Care website. While some face-to-face services offerings have been introduced, these are not currently available to all who may wish to use them. As the front door to the system, it is crucial that My Aged Care is designed to remove complexity and facilitate equitable access for all eligible Australians.

Delivery model and workforce not conducive to providing personalised support

While the contact centre provides a viable option for some people to access My Aged Care, evidence to the review showed that it is not suitable for a significant proportion of older people. Many are making contact with the centre when they are under stress, they already have difficulty navigating complex systems or may already be experiencing cognitive decline. A compounding factor is that contact centre staff are not always well-trained, knowledgeable, helpful or supportive. Having My Aged Care contact centre staff who can't deliver consistent, reliable, high-quality and personalised support significantly impacts on an older person's ability to navigate their way through My Aged Care to an assessment which can leave people without much needed care. There is also a clear need for a more personalised, 'case management' approach to assisting people through their aged care journey, particularly for those older people with complex needs and limited personal supports. The limited availability and narrow eligibility requirements of available supports such as care finders have left many people without the help that they need to navigate the system. Additional service offerings need to be provided to a wider audience so that My Aged Care can become genuinely accessible.

A lack of equity for older people from diverse backgrounds or complex needs

There are specific challenges faced by older people with diverse backgrounds and complex needs seeking to engage with My Aged Care. This includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people living with a disability, people living in rural and remote areas, and those with additional complex needs such as those experiencing or at risk of homelessness. During this review it became clear that many older people in Australia



who are most in need are facing some the greatest barriers to access. My Aged Care is not currently delivering a culturally safe and culturally appropriate service that is responsive to diversity.

Recommendations

The review finds that the current My Aged Care service offer is not fit for purpose. The final report makes recommendations across seven areas that the government can and necessarily should action to improve the operation of My Aged Care and deliver a service that is fit-for-purpose in facilitating access to care for *all* older people in Australia, in line with the rights codified by the new Act:

1. Improving public awareness of the aged care system
2. Improving public awareness and understanding of My Aged Care
3. Reducing system complexity
4. Increasing capacity and capability of the My Aged Care workforce
5. Increasing access to navigational and face-to-face supports
6. Enabling equitable access to aged care
7. Commitment to action

The degree to which these recommendations will be successful in driving the transformative change required depends on their being implemented in concert with one another and not being reformulated as discrete action items or diluted over the course of implementation.