

"Please enable and communicate better to providers about more flexibility on how package funds can be used. For example, 'garden maintenance' is covered, but in my mum's case, the garden was the only thing keeping her going, and it needed maintenance more than once a month. Before we invested in more regular support to keep everything looking good, she became very despondent about seeing it all going to ruin. She also pushed herself too hard to try to maintain it all in between scheduled visits, and that led to more falls, frequent pain and exhaustion. It was very motivating for her to be able to do the small things she could to keep active in the garden and have the bigger jobs and regular tidies, e.g. with a blower that would have been too big for her to handle. Her garden and her cats gave her a reason to get up in the morning and stay active and to want to be at home. It was after her garden went to ruin during an extended stay in the hospital and rehab that she decided to go into permanent care the thought of tidying it all up to return it to how it was, was too much for her to bear. Had her homecare package covered the ongoing maintenance while in temporary care, she may have been more willing to return home.

Likewise, it was cruel and put an unnecessary financial, emotional, and physical burden on me as my mum's main carer, to take care of her elderly cats while mum was in what turned out to be 16 weeks of hospital and transitional care. Until I was confident that mum would not return home, I did not want to rehome her cats because they are old, and it would have created a huge stress for them, putting them in jeopardy, on top of the distress I was already seeing in them from missing my mum. Simply moving them to my home was not an option as my daughter is severely allergic to them when she visited my mum at her home.

I worried about something happening to her beloved cats that would have made her even sadder than she already was about not being at home. Consequently, I was making the one-hour plus return trip twice a day to feed them and lock them up at night. That, together with the stress of the possibility of Mum not being able to return to her beloved home, took a big toll on me, and I ended up having to go on medication to manage high blood pressure. I asked if her package could at least cover a carer letting them out in the morning and feeding them, but this was denied as out of scope, as were any other alternative options to care for them.

I can't imagine how distressing it must be for customers who do not have anyone to care for their beloved pets. If time away from home is not expected to be permanent, if funds are available, customers should have basic costs like keeping gardens and pets so that customers have something to live for to return home, should be covered. These things are vital to the wellbeing of some customers and the value they bring in maintaining physical mobility, motivation, and the simple pleasure of receiving unconditional love from a pet cannot be underestimated. As happens, my mum's wish to die instead of going into care came true despite her having lots of living still to do she suffered an unexpected stroke, which I suspect came from elevated blood pressure around the move. (Did you know nursing homes do not routinely check blood pressure more than monthly?). Her cats are now home with me, and they have been an enormous comfort, as I'm sure they were to my mum, which makes the importance of having someone care for pets when owners cannot even more valued and poignant.

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