

# The Aged Care Workforce Remote Accord

## Response to Rules Release 2a

We welcome the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft Rules for the new Aged Care Act. Our submission focuses on the importance of ensuring equitable access to aged care services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through the incorporation of an Equity of Access fee reduction subsidy into the framework for Support at Home.

### The Aged Care Workforce Remote Accord

The Aged Care Workforce Remote Accord (Remote Accord) is a group of service providers and industry experts delivering aged care services in regional, rural and remote Australia.

The Remote Accord was formed based on the belief that every community—including those in remote and very remote areas of Australia—has an equal right to accessible, high quality aged care services. The Remote Accord saw its genesis in the ‘A Matter of Care: Australia’s Aged Care Workforce Strategy’ report. Strategic Action 11 recommended that the Government and industry support the establishment of a Remote Accord to provide a voice on behalf of providers in remote and very remote areas.

### Key Recommendations

We recommend that the draft Rules incorporate an **equity of access fee reduction supplement** specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accessing Support at Home. This inclusion would align with the intent outlined on page eight of the Aged Care Bill 2024 – Overview of Aged Care Funding (Chapter 4, p. 8):

*“Similar to the hardship supplement for the Home Care Packages program under sections 48-10 to 48-12 of the 1997 Act, the Rules (section 197) will prescribe a fee reduction supplement as a secondary person-centred supplement that may be applicable in the following circumstances:*

- **Financial hardship grounds** – the System Governor considers that the individual paying the individual contribution would cause them financial hardship.
- **Equity of access** – the individual is an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.”

In contrast, the only provision relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the current Aged Care Rules Consultation Draft 2a is the “205B Care management supplement in Subdivision D – Provider-based supplements”, an entirely separate (but nonetheless important) provision. The equity of access fee reduction supplement is a vital tool in addressing the unique and systemic challenges faced by First Nations people

accessing aged care services in remote and very remote locations, and we strongly advise it be retained as initially outlined.

#### Disproportionate disengagement from aged care

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are already disproportionately disengaged from aged care services. Under the draft Rules, individuals who face financial barriers to care must apply for a hardship-based fee reduction supplement when accessing Support at Home. This process creates additional administrative and cultural hurdles for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who may already face systemic barriers to accessing care. Embedding an equity of access fee reduction supplement would streamline this process and proactively address these barriers, improving engagement and outcomes for First Nations people in MMM 6 and 7 locations, and creating an incentive for providers to proactively engage with First Nations people needing access to care services.

#### Perception of cost is a disincentive

The perception that service users will be charged a fee, regardless of whether individuals would qualify for fee reductions or subsidies, acts as a disincentive for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to engage with aged care services. Without an explicit equity of access fee reduction supplement this perception remains unaddressed, further exacerbating disengagement and inequitable access to care.

#### Potential financial burden on services supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities

While we acknowledge that providers can choose to waive charges for individuals regardless of whether they qualify for the fee reduction supplement, this places undue financial strain on providers delivering services predominantly to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Such services often operate with limited resources and may be unable to absorb these losses sustainably. It also acts to widen the disadvantage gap for these communities. Embedding an equity of access fee reduction supplement into the Rules would provide much-needed financial support to these providers, ensuring they can continue to deliver culturally safe care without compromising financial viability. Embedding an equity of access fee reduction supplement would also remove an obstacle to participation for First Nations people accessing aged care in remote Australia.

#### In Summary:

By embedding this equity of access fee reduction supplement into the Rules:

- Barriers to care would be reduced for First Nations people, improving engagement and outcomes
- Providers supporting predominantly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities would receive appropriate financial support to continue delivering culturally appropriate care without incurring unsustainable losses
- The Aged Care Act would better reflect the government's commitment to ensuring equitable, person-centred care for all Australians