

## Aged Care Rules 2024 – Support at Home Funding

### Dementia Australia submission

Dementia Australia appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Aged Care Rules in relation to Support at Home Funding. We look forward to productive discussion about how the Support at Home program can best operate to support equitable access to high-quality care for people living with dementia at home.

### Key points

Dementia Australia continues to be concerned that the funding structure and policy settings of the new Support at Home service model may unintentionally adversely affect people living with dementia.

We have the following key concerns:

1. The lower subsidy basis for non-clinical care may disadvantage people living with dementia, for whom independence and everyday living services are **essential care** and reduce the likelihood of premature entry to residential aged care.
2. The time limit for the end-of-life care package is inappropriate for people living with dementia, whose palliation needs routinely extend beyond 12 weeks.
3. The short-term funding model for allied health, therapy and restorative care would exclude people living with dementia who require ongoing reablement services to maintain independence while experiencing progressively worsening symptoms.
4. The current Dementia and Cognition Supplement does not appear to be included in the new Support at Home model. There are currently no identified funding mechanisms to ensure people living with dementia are not financially disadvantaged compared to their non-disabled peers.
5. People living with dementia are not included in the eligibility list for the extended account period for short-term assistive technology funding.
6. It is unclear how the quarterly rollover budget limit applies to people who are hospitalised or enter residential respite during the quarter.

## Recommendations

Dementia Australia seeks government assurance that people living with dementia will not be financially disadvantaged by the proposed funding model and will have equitable access to essential care services.

Dementia Australia recommends that the Department of Health and Aged Care:

1. Provide assurance to people living with dementia by releasing a public document outlining how the new Support at Home program will operate for people living with dementia. This should include comparative case studies with financial modelling and explanation of how all essential services will be accessed on a pathway from program entry to exit.
2. Issue clarification about the status of the current Dementia and Cognition Supplement and how it will apply in the new Support at Home program.

## Background

- Support at home for people living with dementia includes both clinical services and non-clinical supportive care, including activities of everyday living and independence. Services for self-care, transport, activities of daily living, social support, domestic assistance, yard work, and therapeutic support are vital to maintaining independence and preventing premature entry to residential aged care.
- The funding model categorises these services as non-clinical and therefore subject to means tested consumer contribution, which may disadvantage people living with dementia who require these supports because of disabling functional decline related to their condition.
- Dementia Australia has previously recommended that a pricing mechanism be implemented to ensure the care needs of people living with dementia can be met without financial disadvantage. This could include a dementia loading type or supplement, or other mechanisms.
- The current Dementia and Cognition Supplement for home care assists providers with the cost of caring for people with moderate to severe symptoms of dementia. However, its status in the new Support at Home program is unclear.
- The short-term funding model for allied health and therapies and restorative care excludes people living with dementia. They require ongoing therapeutic support and reablement to manage symptom progression and maintain independence and quality of life while living at home.
- Assistive technologies are also vital in maintaining a range of areas of function for people living with dementia and may need to be accessed over a longer period. Dementia is currently not included alongside other conditions which are eligible for an extended account period for short-term assistive technology funding.

- Dementia Australia provides palliative care services, and our experience suggests that palliative care support for people with dementia frequently extends beyond 12 weeks and must also provide respite support to carers.
- The population of people living with dementia is expected to increase significantly over the next 30 years, from 421,000 in 2024 to more than 812,500 in 2054. Close to 70% of people living with dementia live in the community and this will likely increase as more people choose to live at home in their older age.
- The Support at Home program is a vital measure to support independence and prevent premature entry to residential care. It is critical that the funding model be appropriately structured to meet community expectations for quality care at home into the future, including for those living with dementia.

### **Next steps**

Dementia Australia would appreciate the opportunity to discuss our concerns and recommendations with the Department of Health and Aged Care.

Please contact Dr Kaele Stokes, Executive Director Services, Advocacy and Research on [personal email address redacted]