

To whom it may concern,

SUBMISSION STAGE 2A RELEASE – FUNDING RELATED TO SUPPORT AT HOME

Equity of Access in Aged Care – Fee Reduction Provisions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

Recommendations:

CI Group strongly recommends the immediate inclusion of specific fee-reduction supplements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the new funding rules for the Aged Care Act.

This measure should provide automatic or simplified access to financial relief, without reliance on invasive and bureaucratic hardship assessments. Equity of access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the Shoalhaven, Illawarra, South Coast, Snowy Monaro, and Goulburn must be prioritised to ensure aged care services meet their obligations to cultural safety and inclusion.

Community Industry Group (CI Group) members across the Shoalhaven, Illawarra, South Coast, Snowy Monaro, and Goulburn regions are deeply concerned about the absence of specific fee-reduction supplements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the new funding rules currently under consultation for the Aged Care Act.

CI Group are the leading peak body supporting and advocating for not-for-profit community and human services in Southern NSW.



This omission undermines equitable access to aged care services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, a priority highlighted in the funding overview prepared for the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee inquiry into the Bill.

Our members have raised the following concerns relating to the reliance on hardship provisions as the mechanism to address financial barriers:

1. **Overly Complex and Invasive Processes:**

The hardship provisions require Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to engage in lengthy, bureaucratic processes based on Centrelink assessments. The process is complex, culturally inappropriate, and does not align with the principle of ensuring easy, dignified access to aged care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our regions.

2. **Cultural insensitivity and humiliation:**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders are often required to provide “evidence” of financial hardship, including letters from community members to validate their inability to pay. This process is humiliating and culturally unsafe, conflicting with the values of trust, respect, and autonomy essential for engaging communities in the Shoalhaven, Illawarra, South Coast, Snowy Monaro, and Goulburn areas.

3. **Barrier to accessing services:**

Without a straightforward fee-reduction supplement, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our regions will likely avoid engaging with aged care services entirely. Navigating invasive and lengthy hardship requirements deters participation and discourages those most in need of care. Low-level, low-intensity fee-reduction supplements would provide an accessible pathway, fostering greater confidence and uptake of aged care services.

4. **Failure to address core aims of the New Aged Care Act and overcome historic injustice:**

The omission of an easy-access fee-reduction supplement is counterproductive and fails to address the historical and systemic barriers faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our regional and rural communities.

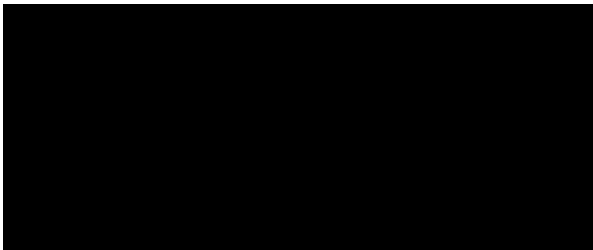
Streamlined financial relief mechanisms ensure inclusion and fairness and will help local providers to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders with culturally appropriate, accessible, and high-quality care.

Our members want to see a practical, culturally safe, and straightforward approach to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders into aged care services. A fee-reduction supplement, as previously recommended to the Senate inquiry, is essential.

Aged care reform must prioritise equity and inclusion, especially for communities who have faced systemic barriers for far too long - all Elders, regardless of their financial circumstances or cultural background, must be able to access the care they need with dignity and respect.

We appreciate your consideration of this submission and welcome the opportunity to discuss these recommendations and concerns with you further.

Sincerely,



**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
OF COUNTRY** | Community Industry Group acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and celebrate their continuing culture, the world's oldest living culture, and the contribution they make to the life of this region and our country.

Acknowledgement

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