

Response to IHACPA Draft Workplan 2024-25

April 2024

Carers Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide input to IHACPA's Draft Workplan. Our particular interest is the inclusion of "developing pricing advice to inform Australian Government decisions on residential aged care and respite care funding".

Respite is highly valued and needed by carers of older people.

Carers Australia in partnership with the University of Canberra, undertakes an annual Carer Wellbeing Survey.¹

The results of the 2023 survey revealed the following with respect to carers of older people:

- 48% said they regularly or always felt they had more responsibility than they could cope with
- 46% said they regularly or always felt they had lost control over their lives
- 30% said that they struggled to cope with the stress of caring activities
- 44 % said that their caring role had impacted negatively on their own health
- Only a third said they had accessed respite in the last 12 months (noting that this will include community respite) and a third reported poor satisfaction with their access to respite (this was a quarter for those who were caring for someone with dementia).

The introduction of AN-ACC, with the attenuated Modified de Morton Mobility Index (DEMMI) to determine the care needs of respite residents, plus other adjustments to the pricing model which equalize, to a large extent, the subsidies for permanent residents was most welcome. We had anticipated that it would lead to a significant growth in access to residential respite services because providers would have more incentive to offer respite.

We have long been aware that, from a provider's perspective, taking in short-term residents is not always an attractive option. Bringing a new person into a facility can create an additional, cumbersome administrative burden and can be disruptive to staff, to other residents and to the person receiving respite care for whom moving into an institutional environment can be a very alien and disconcerting experience unless it is carefully and sensitively managed. Such management requires additional staff time. This is especially the case if:

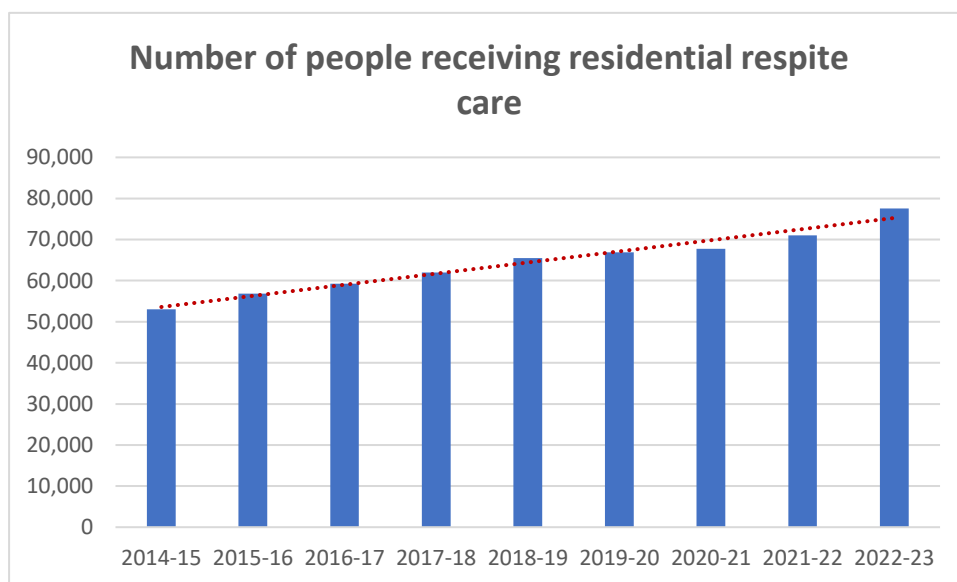
- it is the person's first experience of residential care
- that person has dementia (and may have challenging behaviours)
- the staff have to familiarise themselves with the person's medical conditions and care needs.

¹ Data extracted from data sheets for the 2023 Carer Wellbeing Survey. Data available on request to Carers Australia.

All these things take additional time and effort for what is a short-term placement. And in the past a further provider disincentive has been compounded by the historically low levels of subsidy for residential respite care as opposed to that of permanent residents – which is why it was anticipated that the new funding model would increase the attractiveness of providing respite opportunities.

However, feedback from Carer Gateway providers who organise access to respite is that is a difficult and lengthy process to find access to residential respite in the period carers need it. The situation is particularly bad in outer regional and even some inner regional locations.

It is true that, despite the decline in the number of residential facilities, there has been a gradual increase in the number of people accessing residential respite since the introduction of the AN-ACC funding model in October 2022. However, the numbers were steadily rising over the past ten years, with only a slightly more pronounced increase in 2022-23.



The data reflected in the chart are taken from the annual Reports on the Operation of the Aged Care Act (ROAC) provided by the Department of Health and Aged Care

While the number of people accessing respite may seem high, it needs to be understood that respite is often not used for the purposes for which it was intended. A very high proportion of people use respite on a ‘try before you buy’ basis or for the purpose securing a place while they are sorting out their contractual and other arrangements for permanent care. For example, in 2022-23, 56% of respite users transferred to permanent care shortly after or even on the same day that they exited respite.² Such usage blocks opportunities for the purposes of giving carers a much needed break from caring, which may be essential for many carers to keep on providing care in the home. However, the use of respite to access permanent care is much more attractive to providers.

² Department of Health and Aged Care, Report on the Operation of the Aged Care Act 2022-23 [Accessed online](#)

We have been informed by the Australian Aged and Community Care Providers Association (ACCPA) that their residential aged care members have brought to their attention that the new, improved care subsidies for respite are still too low for respite to cover the on-boarding costs of respite residents and other associated costs with short-term placements.

Against this background, we welcome an IHACPA focus on residential care respite funding in the 2024-25 work program.

About Carers Australia

Carers Australia is the national peak body representing the diversity of the 2.65 million Australians who provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends with a disability, chronic condition, mental illness or disorder, drug or alcohol problem, terminal illness, or who are frail aged.

In collaboration with our members, the peak carer organisations in each state and territory, we collectively form the National Carer Network and are an established infrastructure that represents the views of carers at the national level.

Our vision is an Australia that values and supports all carers, where all carers should have the same rights, choices, and opportunities as other Australians to enjoy optimum health, social and economic wellbeing and participate in family, social and community life, employment, and education.

This includes carers:

- Who have their own care needs
- Who are in multiple care relationships
- Who have employment and/or education commitments
- Aged under 25 years (young carers)
- Aged over 65 years, including 'grandparent carers'
- From culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- Who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex (LGBTI+)
- Who are living in rural and remote Australia, and
- Who are no longer in a caring role (former carers).

Carers Australia acknowledges Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities as the traditional custodians of the land we work on and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. As an inclusive organisation we celebrate people of all backgrounds, genders, sexualities, cultures, bodies, and abilities.

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