

Trying to arrange in-home aged care like 'going to war', new report finds

By Caroline Winter

Posted Wed 6 Mar 2019, 6:00am



PHOTO: The report, released today, looks at support care provided at home for elderly Australians. (AAP/Glenn Hunt)

New government-funded research has revealed there are "systemic problems" in the delivery of aged care home support for older Australians, with extortionate fees, potential robbing and untrained staff all highlighted as concerns.

Those interviewed in the report said dealing with providers was like "going to war" and raised concerns that the taxpayer was being "ripped off", with profits being put before caring for the vulnerable.

"The findings from these participants absolutely shocked me," said Dr Sarah Russell, the author of the report.

"I was expecting home care packages to enable people to live well at home and was very surprised to find some people quite traumatised by the experience."

Fees being put before care

Dr Russell, who is an independent researcher and director of Aged Care Matters, interviewed 40 recipients or relatives of recipients of Commonwealth Home Care Support or Home Care Packages. Some described aggressive sales tactics, which they were not prepared for.

"A provider I spoke with was offering a new Dyson vacuum cleaner if I signed with them. There is heavy persuasion going on."

Participant number 3

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Key points:

- Fees of up to 50 per cent are being charged by some providers for home support of elderly Australians
 - There are concerns that government funding for packages is disappearing in fees instead of going to frontline care
 - Report comes as the Federal Government commits to funding 10,000 more high-level at-home care packages
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Once they had signed up, several participants were astounded at the high case management and administration fees they were charged, which varied dramatically from 9 per cent to more than 50 per cent.

"A woman went through my mum's contract with me and said: 'Do you realise your mum's provider is taking 53 per cent of the package?'"

I was shocked, particularly because I had chosen a not-for-profit provider ... I calculated that when the Level 4 package came in, they were going to be getting \$26,000 per year out of my mum's package."

Participant number 3

Many participants found the monthly financial statements from providers, which detailed what they had spent, "difficult to understand" and "bamboozling". Some reported they were invoiced for services they didn't have or were wrongly calculated.

"How many get duped? It's the Government paying these packages and I'm so grateful for it. I don't like to think they're being ripped off by a company charging for things people don't get."

Participant number 18

Dr Russell said the most common complaint about home care providers was the high turnover of unqualified, inexperienced and untrained support workers and this for her was a major concern.

"The stand-out was the number of different support workers sent to people's homes. So people would open the door and find someone standing there they've never seen before and they are expected to trust this person to come into their home and in many cases, provide intimate care, for example showering, and I find it very upsetting," she said.

One family's experience

The family of 91-year-old Philomena Horsley did everything they could to keep her out of aged care.

Her daughter, who bears the same name, admires her mother immensely and said the former Melbourne pharmacist and single mother of seven was always her own woman.

"She brought up seven children on her own once my father died and she was adamant she wanted to be at home, die at home," she said.

Philomena Horsley has advanced Parkinson's disease and spent three years on a Level 2 home care package.

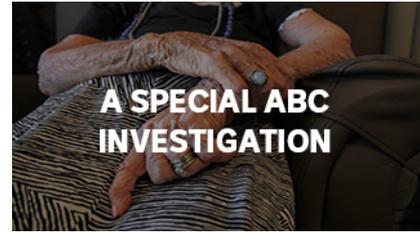
Her daughter said it allowed for three hours of care a week for the \$15,000 in government funding.

"Our experience was kind of shocking. Forty-one per cent of her package was going in administration fees and on top of that, there was exorbitant charges for hourly rates and she [my mother] thought, 'I'm getting half of what I'm entitled to as a package'," she said.

"The administration fees were not transparent.

"Mum told me the support workers were being paid \$18-\$20 per hour and

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The staff speaking out for residents



In the ABC's biggest crowd-sourced investigation, current and former aged care workers reveal the chronic neglect, mistreatment and understaffing in facilities across the country.

14 hours strapped to a chair



Video and photos obtained by the ABC show dementia patients strapped to their chairs in a Sydney nursing

yet she was being charged \$70-\$80 per hour for that charge-out fee."

home — a practice the Australian Law Reform Commission says could constitute elder abuse.

Philomena Horsley said the monthly financial statements were impossible to read, there was poor communication with the provider and the experience from start to finish was complicated and frustrating.

"It just seems like you put your trust in the provider and in the Government to ensure the provider is doing the right thing," she explained.



PHOTO: Victoria passed legislation to introduce laws to allow doctor-assisted dying in November, 2017. (Unsplash: rawpixel)

"I'm not sure that trust is well-deserved."

Philomena Horsley waited 14 months for a level-four package, but it never came. Last year, she went into an aged care home.

In-home care becoming more important

The waiting list for home care packages has blown out to almost 127,000, resulting in many older people waiting more than a year to receive care.

The Federal Government recently announced it would fund 10,000 new high-level home care packages.

Dr Russell said that as the population ages, those opting for home care will skyrocket but adds that this expansion must be managed correctly.



PHOTO: One participant reported "anomaly after anomaly" when they went through their billing. (ABC News: Natasha Johnson)

"There were people in my sample who were very grateful and were receiving really good services. It was mostly from the local smaller providers," she said. "So, in my view we need to get the unscrupulous providers out of this sector. The only way I can think to do this is with good regulation."

There are about 870 service providers in Australia and 36 were featured in this latest report, although none of them were named. Of those featured, only 15 were described as good providers that delivered a high-quality service and charged reasonable fees.

In response to questions from the ABC, Aged Care Minister Ken Wyatt said it was of "great concern" that older Australians were not having an optimal experience through the Government-funded home care system, but he said the Government was already making efforts to ensure compliance from providers.

"I am concerned about the practice of some providers charging high levels of case management and administration costs," he said in a statement.

"I expect administrative charges to be kept to a minimum, to maximise service delivery for older Australians.

"The Government is committed to improving access to information, including better transparency of pricing so people can compare providers and make informed decisions about which provider they choose to deliver their care."

Industry defends service providers



PHOTO: The royal commission into aged care has started in Adelaide. (ABC Southern Qld: Peter Gunders)

Patricia Sparrow, CEO of provider industry body Aged and Community Services Australia, said fees vary depending on a variety of factors, like the type of service and geographical location of recipient.

"We think by and large services are fairly well-delivered, noting of course that as a fairly unique human service there are things that sometimes can and will go wrong, we always regret when that happens and are committed to continuous improvement and to make sure we address issues as they arrive," she said.

She could not say what would be an appropriate percentage for fees, nor if someone paying 53 per cent of their total package would be unreasonable.

"I would be surprised if there were many people paying that now and as I said, I haven't seen the report, so you may have data that I'm yet to see, but we would expect in most cases those fees would be less," she said.

The Federal Government directed home care providers to publish their prices on My Aged Care by 30 November 2018.

Several providers are still yet to list theirs.

Topics: aged-care, royal-commissions, older-people, federal-government, australia