

The elephant in the room just got larger

A DRAMATIC announcement about our aged care system was made on 14 September when the government released the first round of data on Home Care Packages waiting lists.

There are currently 90,000 home care packages but we learnt that over 53,000 more people approved for packages don't have one, and another 35,000 are on a lower package than they are approved for.

The government is to be congratulated for promptly publishing the waiting list data, and especially congratulated for having the courage to convert a large number of lower level packages into 6,000 extra Level 3 and 4 packages.

That results in a significant drop in the total number of packages, but the need is at the higher levels.

COTA advocated for this solution from December last



Ian Yates, chief executive, COTA Australia

year, well ahead of the Tune Review, but even we did not anticipate the full scale of outstanding need.

That need is not just the elephant in the room – it's a mammoth.

David Tune didn't have these figures, or his recommendations would likely have been more dramatic. But he knew we

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had a big problem and he recommended that we change the mix of package levels, as government has started doing, and then review the ratio of residential to home care.

The issue government now faces is that there is no easy fix. We can switch the residential and home care ratios by several percentage points tomorrow – and we should do so – but it produces no new money

for packages for about four years, which is the lead time for residential places.

We can convert more of the 50,000 packages coming through over the next few years into high care, but that results in a lot fewer packages.

A realignment of package levels should occur, but it's not a solution for the more than 45,000 people right now (after the 6,000 new ones) who are in often quite drastic need.

There is no realistic alternative for government than to put new money – a substantial amount – into aged care now to clear the home care backlog, while resetting the longer-term budget to meet the now clearly evidenced level of need.

It will be a hard decision amidst the commitment to budget repair, but repair of an aged care system that doesn't meet the approved needs of tens of thousands of older Australians is an equal imperative. ■

A decade of healthy ageing

THERE IS ONE global trend of which we can be certain: populations around the world are rapidly ageing.

We know that this demographic change impacts on almost every aspect of society – from fiscal budgets and employment trends to the built environment and housing demands; it influences family structure and engagement, even the demand for different goods and services.

One thing that clearly defines older age is the great diversity seen in health and functioning, and we know that health is central to how individuals experience later life.

Health and function are partly due to genetics but also greatly influenced by the life course; including the cumulative impacts of advantage or disadvantage across people's lives.

As such, we need to consider policy responses that can overcome these inequities.

The World Health Organisation's 2016 *Global strategy and action plan on ageing and health* provides a policy framework to promote a global response to population ageing.

This strategy considers healthy ageing from the holistic perspective of functional ability that enables older people to thrive – both socially and physically. Functional ability is determined not just by the intrinsic capacity of the individual, but also by the physical and social environments they inhabit.

The WHO took this focus further by announcing concerted global action through a decade of healthy ageing from 2020 to 2030.

There are 10 key points identified to support achieving such an ambitious plan:

- building a platform for innovation and change
- supporting countries with planning and action
- collecting better global data on healthy ageing

- promoting research that addresses the needs of older people
- aligning health systems to the needs of older people
- laying the foundations for long-term care systems in every country
- ensuring the necessary human resources for integrated care of older people
- undertaking a global campaign to combat ageism
- making the economic case for investment in healthy ageing
- developing the global network of age-friendly cities and communities

I am sure we can all identify areas within this plan where we can work together to share knowledge and improve the ageing experience for all older people in the decades to come.

You can read more about the WHO's strategy at who.int/ageing/10-priorities. ■



Dr Helen Barrie (Feist), president of the AAG

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