



THE HON JUSTINE ELLIOT MP

Minister for Ageing

MEDIA RELEASE

17 March 2008

JE08/20

Rapid response team to assess elderly people waiting for government assistance

A new mobile Rapid Response Team will be set up to help older Australians who have been waiting to be assessed for vital government funded aged care, the Federal Minister for Ageing, Justine Elliot, today announced.

The \$250,000 pilot is part of a \$1 million boost to cut assessment waiting times for older Australians in 'black spots'.

To gain access to aged care services, a person must usually be assessed by an Aged Care Assessment Team.

The rapid response team is expected to target far northern NSW and northern Sydney. It will then move to other priority areas across Australia.

One of the worst affected areas is Manly-Warringah where there can be a wait of up to 13 months for an assessment to access a community care package.

In other parts of the state – Hornsby, Sydney's eastern suburbs and far North Coast NSW - people are waiting up to three months.

The new Rapid Response Team is headed by an experienced assessment team manager with nursing qualifications who is supported by aged care experts/allied health workers.

Under the system inherited from the previous government, older Australians have been waiting up to three months for assessments.

Earlier this month, Mrs Elliot met with the NSW Health Minister, Ms Reba Meagher, to discuss the issue.

It is the first stage of the Rudd Government's response to a national review of Aged Care Assessment Teams (ACATS) begun by the previous government.

"Frail older Australians deserve to be assessed quickly so they can get appropriate aged care and help," Mrs Elliot said.

"The sooner people are assessed the sooner they can get help – it is as simple as that.

“It is unacceptable that aged-care residential beds are vacant and community packages are not being used while people are waiting for assessment.

“The excellent work of the assessment teams is being hampered by a flawed system inherited from the previous government.

“These teams are a vital gateway for people to get Commonwealth-funded services from aged-care residential beds to packages allowing them to stay longer in their homes and local communities.”

An implementation plan based on the recommendations in the National Review of Aged Care Assessment Teams report is being developed in consultation with the states and territories.

Recommendations being adopted include:

- Improve the way people are prioritised for assessment;
- Improve public awareness of the role of ACATS and how to gain access to them;
- Reduce administrative burdens on the teams so they can put patient solutions first;
- Increased information sharing and networking between teams around the country;
- A national training strategy for ACATS; and
- Nationally consistent performance benchmarks.

This will be followed by the deployment of more aged care assessors to help with the backlog of aged care assessments.

“We expect that this work will be mirrored in areas of need in Queensland and I will be encouraging cooperation across the country as part of the COAG priorities for reform,” Mrs Elliot said.

The National Review of Aged Care Assessment Teams report, which was commissioned under COAG leadership, can be viewed on the Department of Health and Ageing’s web site at:

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ageing-acat-national-review-acat-consultancy-2007.htm>

There are 115 Aged Care Assessment Teams in Australia made up of health professionals who assess people’s care needs and help them find appropriate services.

The teams may include geriatricians, nurses, social workers, occupational therapists and psychologists or physiotherapists.

The Australian Government provides funding to state and territory governments to operate the ACATS, which visit people in their home or can be located at hospitals or community centres.

For more information, contact Mrs Elliot's office on (02) 6277 7280