Good morning everyone. Thank you for joining me here today.

I thank my Parliamentary colleagues and members of the aged care sector for their attendance.

Before I begin I want to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people, and pay my respects to Elders past, present and future.

The Increasing Choice in Home Care reforms commence today.

This is a major milestone in the Australian Government's aged care reform agenda.

In close collaboration with the aged care sector, carers, consumers and peak bodies we are taking a significant step to improve the way home care services are delivered to older Australians.

I welcome the opportunity to outline, in a very clear and practical sense, what increasing choice in home care means for older Australians.

Before we get started I’d like to show you a short video that will give you an overview of the changes.

[Video plays]

I hope you found the video helpful because we have just seen some clear examples about what Increasing Choice in Home Care really means for the consumer and the provider.

Now I’d like to elaborate on three important elements of Increasing Choices in Home Care.
First, it means that the consumer will choose who provides their care, and they can change their provider at any time.

Secondly, there will be a consistent national process for prioritising access to home care.

And third, red tape and regulation for providers will be reduced.

Most importantly, funding for a home care package will be portable.

This portability includes both new home care recipients, but extends to all holders of a home care package.

You’ll also be able to direct your funding to the provider of your choice, to suit your individual needs.

If, for example, you live in Melbourne and decide you want to live in Perth to be closer to your family, your home care package shouldn’t stop you moving interstate.

From today, you will be able change your provider and any unused money in the account—less any account fee—will go with you to your new home care provider.

These are important changes.

These are changes for a 21st century aged care system.

And while I accept that change can be challenging — these changes to home care packages are backed up with comprehensive, easy to find and easy to understand information and guidance.

A range of consumer focussed materials to help older Australians make an informed choice are now available from the My Aged Care website

The materials will also be issued by assessments teams.

We’ve also improved the service finders available on My Aged Care, making it easier to compare services to provide you with care to suit your individual needs – whether it’s a service that meets your cultural needs, or has a better price.

Since 1 July last year, to 30 June 2020, $136.6 million will be invested in the My Aged Care contact centre.

This measure increases the capacity of the My Aged Care contact centre so that more consumers can access aged care information and services.

Increasing the capacity of My Aged Care will make sure that if you have any issues or queries or concerns you can call the 1800 number and get the assistance you need.

Please don’t sit back and worry or wonder what the changes mean for you or a loved one.
Please call the 1800 number — that’s 1800 200 422 — and talk to someone who knows My Aged Care, inside and out.

I really encourage you to use this service.

I want to take a moment and drill down to some other important information.

Aged Care Assessment Teams will continue to assess individuals for home care at specific home care package levels.

A consistent national system for prioritising access to home care will be established through a ‘national prioritisation system’ managed by My Aged Care.

Currently, there can be significant variation in the waiting periods for packages across Australia, with no systematic way of measuring or addressing that variation.

A consistent national system will allow for a more equitable and flexible distribution of packages to consumers based on individual needs and circumstances, regardless of where you live.

And I’m pleased to announce that in the first month of operation throughout March, we will release more than 11,000 packages followed by a more regular release that fits with demand better, and obviously fits within the forward estimates for Home Care Packages.

I would strongly recommend that providers who haven’t already done so, to make sure they are set up correctly on the My Aged Care portal to better connect with assessors and consumers.

The way consumers are prioritised will take account of their relative needs and circumstances and the time they have been waiting for care.

This will allow for a more equitable and flexible distribution of packages, regardless of where people live.

Another important change is that we are streamlining the process to become an approved provider by reducing red tape.

The focus will now be on the ability of the organisation as a whole to deliver quality care.

Approved providers of residential care and flexible care will be able to ‘opt-in’ to provide home care, rather than going through a full application process.

Once approved provider status has been granted, it will no longer lapse after two years.

Approved providers will no longer need to apply for home care places through an Aged Care Approvals Round and can adjust the services they offer to meet demand across different service areas and home care package levels.

This is a timely reminder for providers to load up, or update, your details on the ‘service finder’ function on My Aged Care. Be realistic about what services you are actually offering, not just what you aspire to offer at this stage.
The more providers, the more services, and the better the ‘service finder’ tool will be.

While some things are changing, other aspects of Home Care services will remain the same.

Existing home care consumers will continue to receive services at their current package level.

There will be no changes to current fee and income testing arrangements.

Claims and payments will still be made through the Department of Human Services Aged Care Payment System.

Home care subsidy and supplements will continue to be paid to approved providers, not directly to consumers.

Approved providers must continue to meet relevant quality and accreditation standards.

Transition provisions are included in the legislation to ensure existing home care consumers continue to receive care and services at their existing package level.

While the total number of home care packages across the country will still be capped, the Government is still committed to delivering 100,000 packages by the end of 2018.

Many people are choosing to stay home and in their communities as they age.

We have to have a system that puts the consumer front and centre and it has to be flexible, affordable and sustainable.

We all want to feel empowered to choose the life we want, how we live and access any help we might need on life’s journey.

Today’s announcement is fundamentally about increasing choice but it’s also about reforming, renewing and revitalising our aged care system so that older Australians—the people that built this nation—can lead a dignified and respectful old age on their terms.