



THE HON JUSTINE ELLIOT MP

Minister for Ageing

MEDIA RELEASE

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Rudd Government Takes Action on Delays to Assess Older Australians for Aged Services: ACATS and \$72.16 Million Injection

Thousands of elderly Australians waiting to receive aged and community care will get faster services under two major measures announced today by the Australian Government.

The Minister for Ageing Mrs Justine Elliot announced the two measures. They are:

- The introduction of Federal legislation this morning will reduce unnecessary re-assessments by the national care teams – which will cut red tape for older Australians and assessors; and
- A \$72.16 million funding injection to the States and Territories for Aged Care Assessment Program for 2008-09.

This morning (October 16), Mrs Elliot is expected to introduce **Aged Care Amendment (2008 Measures No. 2) Bill 2008** into Federal Parliament.

These measures will allow Aged Care Assessment Teams (ACATs) to reduce delays in assessment of frail older Australians.

The role of ACATs is to assess the care needs of older Australians and to determine their eligibility for Australian Government-funded services – such as community aged care, nursing homes and aged care hostels.

Teams are generally comprised of geriatricians, GPs, nurses, psychologists, social workers, physiotherapists and occupational therapists who assess the needs of frail older people and offer advice on suitable care options.

“ACATs are a vital part of the aged care system and help older people and their carers determine the most appropriate care package to help them remain independent in their own homes or if necessary enter an aged care facility,” Mrs Elliot said.

Under the proposed new laws, approval for residential respite care and high level residential care will not lapse automatically after 12 months – as is the current situation.

Unnecessary reassessments by ACATs significantly impact on efficiency of ACATs and lead to considerable assessment waiting times for frail older Australians who need them.

However, an older person will still have the opportunity to be assessed at any time, if a person’s care needs change.

In addition, if a person is eligible to receive an Extended Aged Care at Home (EACH) or an EACH Dementia, the person will also be eligible for a Community Aged Care Package – without needing to be re-assessed.

“We want to cut red tape and unnecessary duplication – my main priority is the care and welfare of older Australians.”

Last year, there were 46,000 community care packages in Australia, complementing the nearly 170,000 residential aged care beds supported by the Federal Government.

The Australian Government funds three types of community care packages. They are:

- Community Aged Care Packages (CACPs), which provides support services for older people who would otherwise require low-level residential aged care;
- Extended Aged Care at Home (EACH), for people who need high-level care; and
- the specialised Extended Aged Care at Home Dementia packages (EACH Dementia), which provide the equivalent of high-level residential care in the home for people with dementia.

Mrs Elliot said these measures highlight the Federal Government’s commitment to aged care in this country.

“These measures are about improving the assessment times for elderly Australians who need community or residential aged care,” Mrs Elliot.

The **Aged Care Amendment (2008 Measures No. 2) Bill 2008** provides the most extensive changes to the aged care regulatory regime in 10 years and is the first broad change to the Aged Care Act under the Rudd Labor Government.

“We want to cut red-tape as much as possible when it comes to people being assessed by an ACAT team – that is what these changes are aimed at,” Mrs Elliot said.

The \$72 million in funding to be paid to the State and Territory Governments who deliver the Aged Care Assessment Program on behalf of the Australian Government.

The funding, which reflects growth in the aged population as well as annual indexation, also includes almost \$4 million to the States and Territories to implement measures to improve the timeliness and consistency of aged care assessments.

2008-09 Funding allocations for the Aged Care Assessment Program

State	Funding
New South Wales	\$24,762,955
Victoria	\$17,514,619
Queensland	\$12,440,713
South Australia	\$6,591,525
Western Australia	\$7,188,652
Tasmania	\$1,909,243
Northern Territory	\$988,711
Australian Capital Territory	\$779,582
TOTAL	\$72,176,000

“This is part of the Australian Government’s \$40 billion commitment to aged and community care responding to the challenges of Australia’s ageing population.

“Within 20 years, a third of Australians will be older than 55. Within 50 years, the proportion of the population over 65 will have tripled.

“The Rudd Government is committed to building a modern Australia, capable of meeting the challenges of the 21st century and our ageing population,” Mrs Elliot said.

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