



Who is responsible for health care for older people?

Older people have the same right to free, timely and safe public hospital and health care as everyone else.

Purpose

This document explains who is responsible for health care for older people using aged care services.

It is for aged care providers, health care providers, governments and system leaders. This document may also help older people, families, carers and supporters understand how the health and aged care systems should work together.

- This is a plain English version. The full statement is the formal version.
- This statement is not a law. It explains existing roles under health and aged care laws and agreements.

What should happen

These points explain how health care should work for older people who use aged care services.

Governments and systems

- The safety, health, wellbeing and quality of life of older people must come first.
- The aged care system should put older people first. It should treat each person as an individual and respect their rights.
- The Australian Government and state and territory governments share responsibility for making health and aged care systems work well together.
- The Australian Government funds and regulates aged care. It must help make sure older people receive safe, high-quality aged care that meets their needs.
- The Australian Government plans and funds aged care services. This helps make sure there are enough services to meet demand.
- The Australian Government also funds primary health care. This includes Medicare, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and Primary Health Networks.
- State and territory governments manage public hospitals and public health services. They must plan services so people can get the right care when they need it.
- Older people using aged care have the same right as everyone else to public hospital care as public patients, based on clinical need.

- Older people may still need other services like mental health care, memory clinics, palliative care, disability supports and behaviour supports. Services should work together around the person.

Clinical care

- All clinical care providers share responsibility for safe and well-planned care. This includes diagnosis, care plans, treatment plans, discharge planning and sharing information.
- Receiving aged care must not stop an older person from getting public hospital care when they need it.
- Aged care providers must coordinate care and respond when a person's health, memory, thinking skills, wellbeing or quality of life changes.
- Clinical staff in aged care should be supported to use the skills they have.
- Aged care providers must seek extra care when needed. This can include referral to primary care, early support or specialist care.
- Aged care, primary care, Primary Health Networks, community health services and hospitals should work together. They should provide culturally safe care for all older people.
- Older people have the same right as everyone else to choose public hospital and health services as public patients.

Roles and responsibilities for clinical care

Australian Government

The Australian Government supports clinical care through:

- the aged care system, including aged care assessments and funded services
- Medicare, including general practice, nurse practitioners, practice nurses, allied health, pathology and telehealth
- specialist medical care, including mental health care
- Primary Health Networks, which fund primary health care services to meet local needs
- behaviour support services funded by the Australian Government
- the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and community pharmacy services.

State and territory governments

State and territory governments provide and manage public hospital and public health services. This includes:

- public hospital care, including emergency care, outpatient care, rehabilitation and care after a hospital stay
- health and aged care support in Multi-Purpose Services
- specialist health support for people in Specialist Dementia Care Program units
- Aged Care Outreach Services
- care that primary care or aged care would not usually provide
- specialist allied health, specialist nursing, specialist palliative care, geriatric care, mental health care for older people, complex chronic care, infectious disease response and emergency response.

Residential aged care providers

Residential aged care providers must deliver safe and high-quality care. They must also check and improve the systems they use to keep care safe.

They must also help older people move safely between services. This includes planned and unplanned moves to and from residential aged care, hospitals and other health services.

Residential aged care providers may deliver clinical care directly or arrange it through another provider.

Their responsibilities include:

- nursing care, personal care and oral health care
- care planning, regular reviews and support to make an advance care directive or advance care plan
- wound care, pressure injury prevention, pain management and medicines support
- help to notice and respond when a person's health gets worse
- care for people living with dementia
- care for people who need support because of their body size or weight
- replacement of medical devices
- help to access medical appointments, including transport where needed
- allied health and therapy programs to help residents keep or regain daily living skills
- infection prevention and control training and oversight
- aids and equipment that meet a resident's assessed care needs
- health promotion, such as advice about diet, exercise and vaccinations
- support for social participation, quality of life and mental and social wellbeing
- palliative care that supports comfort and dignity at the end of life.

In-home aged care providers

In-home aged care providers deliver Australian Government-funded care in a person's home and community.

They must notice and respond when a person's needs change. They must seek extra care when needed. Clinical care can include:

- care that does not need a hospital stay
- nursing care by staff who are trained and authorised to provide it
- support with food, fluids and diet-related care
- skin care, wound prevention and wound management
- continence care
- medicine support and administration
- help to move safely and prevent falls
- replacement of medical devices
- help to access health practitioners and clinical services
- assistive technology and home modifications, including related support
- care that helps a person regain skills, stay independent or maintain their health

- allied health and therapy supports, such as dietetics, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, psychology, social work and speech pathology
- general palliative and end-of-life care, alongside specialist palliative care where needed
- care for older people who need support because of their body size or weight.

Glossary

Term	Meaning
Advance care directive	An advance care directive is a legal document that records a person's choices for future health care. A person can make one while they can still make their own decisions. It may also name another person to make health care decisions for them if needed.
Advance care plan	A written record of a person's wishes, values and preferences for future care. It may guide care if the person cannot speak for themselves.
Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission	The national regulator for Australian Government-funded aged care services.
Allied health	Health services provided by professionals other than doctors and nurses. Examples include physiotherapy, occupational therapy, dietetics, psychology, social work and speech pathology.
Assistive technology	Equipment or devices that help a person do everyday tasks, move safely, communicate or stay independent.
Behaviour support	Support that helps understand and respond to changes in behaviour, especially where a person may be distressed or at risk of harm.
Carer	A person who gives personal care, support and help to an older person. This does not include paid workers or volunteers who provide services for an organisation.
Clinical care	Health care that helps prevent, treat or manage illness or injury. It also supports mental, physical, social and emotional wellbeing. It can be provided by doctors, nurses, pharmacists, allied health professionals and other regulated health practitioners.
Community health services	Health services delivered outside hospital, often in local clinics or people's homes.
Culturally safe care	Care that respects a person's culture, identity, beliefs, language and lived experience.

Term	Meaning
Discharge planning	Planning for a safe move from hospital to home, residential aged care or another service.
General practice	Health care provided by general practitioners, also called GPs. GPs are often the first point of contact for medical care.
Geriatric care	Health care for older people, often focused on complex health needs, frailty, memory, mobility and daily living.
Health practitioner	A person who is trained and authorised to provide health care, such as a doctor, nurse, pharmacist or allied health professional.
In-home aged care	Australian Government-funded aged care services that help older people live at home and stay connected to their community. Some programs give basic support. Others support people with higher or more complex needs.
Medicare	Australia's public health insurance system. It helps pay for many health services, including visits to doctors and some tests.
Multi-Purpose Services	Services in some rural and remote areas that combine health and aged care services in one place.
Non-acute (or maintenance) care	Care for a person who needs ongoing support because of a health condition, disability or loss of function. This care may be needed for a long time.
Outpatient care	Health care provided by a hospital or clinic when the person does not stay overnight.
Palliative care	Care that supports comfort, dignity and quality of life for a person with a life-limiting illness. It can also support families and carers.
Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme	The Australian Government program that helps make many prescription medicines more affordable.
Primary care	Health care usually provided in the community, such as care from GPs, nurses, pharmacists and allied health professionals.
Primary Health Networks	Regional organisations funded by the Australian Government to improve access to primary health care and meet local health needs.

Term	Meaning
Public patient	A person who receives care in a public hospital under Medicare, without choosing their own doctor.
Registered provider	An organisation that is approved to deliver Australian Government-funded aged care services.
Registered supporter	A person who helps an older person make and communicate their own decisions about aged care.
Regulated health practitioner	A health professional who must be registered with a national board to practise, such as a doctor, nurse, pharmacist, physiotherapist or psychologist.
Residential aged care	Aged care delivered in an aged care home by an approved provider.
Specialist care	Health care provided by a clinician with extra training in a particular area, such as geriatrics, palliative care, mental health or infectious diseases.
Specialist Dementia Care Program	A program that provides specialised care for people with very severe behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia.
Sub-acute care	Care that helps a person recover after illness or injury, manage symptoms, or keep doing everyday activities. It can include rehabilitation, palliative care, care from a doctor who specialises in older people, and mental health care for older people.
Telehealth	Health care provided by phone or video instead of in person.
Wound care	Care that helps prevent, treat and manage wounds or injuries to the skin.