



# Guidance on Priority for Home Care Services

## Key principles

Clients assessed by an ACAT and approved as eligible for a Home Care Package must be approved for a:

- Home Care Package level – either 1, 2, 3, or 4 with the package level indicating the current care needs of the client; and
- Home care services priority – either medium or high priority with the priority indicating how quickly the client requires the package. The default priority will be medium priority with only a small percentage of clients who are at immediate risk being approved as high priority.

Care level and priority for home care service are not necessarily linked – a level 4 client will not always have a ‘high’ priority for home care service – they may need a high level of care, but not be at immediate risk for a range of reasons.

The priority for home care service is a Delegate decision, similar to the package level decision, and can be appealed by a client if they disagree with the decision.

Clients will be told what their priority for home care service is in their approval letter that will inform them which level of package they have been approved for.

## Key elements of the National Prioritisation Queue

The National Prioritisation Queue allows a consistent national approach to prioritising access to Home Care Packages through My Aged Care. The queue provides a more equitable and flexible way of distributing Home Care Packages based on consumers’ individual circumstances, regardless of where they live.

Clients will be prioritised based on the following two variables:

- Time waited for package (commencing from the date of Delegate approval); and
- Priority for home care service.

## Priority for home care service

When making a decision about which package level to recommend a client for at the end of assessment, assessors will also need to make a decision about the client's priority for home care service. The priority will default to 'medium', as this should apply to the majority of clients. However, an assessor can amend the My Aged Care system 'priority for service' to select 'high'. If an assessor changes the priority to high, they will be required to provide a reason. This will then be sent to the Delegate for approval along with the level recommendation.

An assessor's recommendation regarding a client's priority for home care service should be based on their clinical judgement, information they have gathered during the comprehensive assessment and knowledge of the relative urgency of the client's need for a Home Care Package. The priority recommendation must be consistent with the care needs of the person.

The table below describes the difference between medium versus high priority and how this will influence a client's position on the national queue.

Table 1: Comparison between medium and high priority, including factors to consider

|                    | MEDIUM priority   | HIGH priority   |
|--------------------|---|---|
| <b>Description</b> | <p>This priority should apply to the majority of clients approved for home care.</p> <p>A 'medium' priority for home care services should indicate that while a client is in need of a Home Care Package, their need is not as urgent, relative to some other clients.</p> <p>The client should not be at immediate risk in terms of health, physical injury, safety or significant decline that may result in the client needing to enter a residential care home.</p> | <p>This priority should only apply to a small number of clients approved for home care.</p> <p>A 'high' priority for home care services is defined as: Client is considered at urgent and immediate risk in terms of their personal safety or at immediate risk of entry to residential care. The client may have a carer and the carer arrangements are unsustainable or at crisis point.</p> <p>Clients with special needs should not automatically be considered to have a 'high' priority, as they may not have an urgent need to access a package quickly.</p> |

|                                 | MEDIUM priority   | HIGH priority   |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Application in the queue</b> | <p>Clients will be placed in the 'medium' priority stream of the national queue according to when they received their approval for home care.</p> | <p>Clients will be placed on the 'high' priority stream of the national queue according to when they received their approval for home care.</p> <p>The intention of the 'high' priority queue is that it will move more quickly than the 'medium' priority queue.</p> <p>However, there is no guarantee a client will receive a package in a certain time period. There are a limited number of packages available for high priority clients each package release.</p> <p>How quickly a package will be assigned will depend on how many other clients have also been assigned a 'high' priority.</p> |

NB Consistency in assessing priority enables clients with the most urgent need to receive care promptly and supports the flow of packages to others.

### Guidance for home care package high priority

ACAT guidance for home care package high priority has been developed to inform and support assessors when determining a client's priority for home care service. This assists assessors to check whether a client falls into one of the 'high' priority categories and highlights other support arrangements that need to be considered prior to assigning a high priority for home care services. The guide is provided on the following page for reference.

This guide has been developed for and with Aged Care Assessment Teams to inform and support their decision making when recommending a high priority for a Home Care Package.

**High Priority is defined as:**

*Client is considered at urgent and immediate risk in terms of their personal safety or at immediate risk of admission into residential care. The client may have a carer and the carer arrangements are unsustainable or the carer is at crisis point.*



## CARER ARRANGEMENTS ARE UNSUSTAINABLE OR CARER AT CRISIS POINT



## CLIENT AT IMMEDIATE RISK DUE TO PERSONAL SAFETY OR IMMEDIATE RISK OF ADMISSION INTO RESIDENTIAL CARE

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR ASSIGNING HIGH PRIORITY

The carer is in crisis or no longer able to provide care due to:

- A change in the carer/s personal circumstances i.e. death/significant decline in carers own health status.
- An inability to sustain their caring role due to a lack of assistance being received i.e. the client has significant needs and no (or minimal) support is being provided.

*NOTE: Carer in crisis is different to caregiver stress. Caregiver stress is a condition of exhaustion, anger, or guilt that results from unrelieved caring for a chronically ill dependent. The stress can vary depending on the individual, and generally does not prohibit the carer from providing care. Caregiver stress can be reduced by accessing respite care.*

Personal safety at risk and/or:

- There is an immediate risk of the client entering residential care due to:
  - Carer in crisis and/or inability of carer to offer required support; or
  - Lack of interim services to meet the client needs.

And, if the client had access to these services (as soon as possible), they could be managed at home.

### OTHER FORMAL/ INFORMAL SUPPORT CONSIDERATIONS

- Emergency respite care <https://www.dss.gov.au/disability-and-carers/programmes-services/for-carers/commonwealth-respite-and-carelink-centres>
- Carer gateway <https://www.caregateway.gov.au/>
- Residential respite <https://www.myagedcare.gov.au/respite-care>
- Carers Australia <http://www.carersaustralia.com.au/>
- [State and Community based services](#)

- After-hospital care (transition care) <https://www.myagedcare.gov.au/after-hospital-care-transition-care>
- [State and Community based services](#)
- Short term restorative care <https://www.myagedcare.gov.au/short-term-restorative-care/about-short-term-restorative-care> NB Available only to clients who are not already receiving a home care package

**NOTE** If the client does not wish to accept other interim services or informal/formal supports they should not be considered high priority.

## Re-assessment

Following a comprehensive assessment, allocating a person's priority requires an ACAT Delegate decision and is a reviewable decision under the *Aged Care Legislation Amendment (Increasing Consumer Choice) Act 2016*. Any change to the priority for home care will need a re-assessment by an ACAT to inform the ACAT Delegate of the evidence that constitutes the need for a new decision around priority. This re-assessment record is also required in the event that the decision is subject to a reconsideration process under the *Aged Care Act 1997*. However, the format of the re-assessment (e.g. face-to-face interview, phone call etc.) would depend on the level of evidence required to satisfy the Delegate in order to make their decision.

## Review

The Department will be reviewing the allocation of priority recommendations when approving Home Care Packages in order to ensure that there are no unintended consequences and that people are receiving timely access to services.



### FURTHER INFORMATION

- For further information on determining Home Care Package levels, please visit <https://agedcare.health.gov.au/programs-services/my-aged-care/information-for-assessors> to review the guidance materials.

*Note: The information provided is intended as general information and not as prescriptive advice. Assessors will use their professional training, conduct of a comprehensive assessment and clinical judgement to determine the most appropriate priority for home care services.*