

2025 progress report on the implementation of Royal Commission recommendations

March 2025

Introduction

Dementia is one of the largest health and social challenges facing Australia and the world. In 2025, there are an estimated 433,300 people living with dementia in Australia. This figure is projected to increase to an estimated 812,500. An estimated 1.7 million people in Australia are involved in the care of someone living with dementia. As dementia prevalence continues to rise, it is critical that aged care reforms respond to the needs of people living with dementia.

Dementia Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to inform the Inspector-General of Aged Care's Progress Report on the implementation of the Aged Care Royal Commission's recommendations. While we acknowledge the reforms undertaken since the Royal Commission, we remain concerned that the current system continues to fail people living with dementia and their carers. This submission outlines key concerns and provides recommendations to ensure the aged care system delivers high-quality, rights-based, and person-centred care for people with dementia.

What are your impressions of:

a) overall progress with implementation of the Royal Commission's recommendations?

While some key reforms have been implemented (e.g., 24/7 registered nurses in residential care, star ratings, and restrictive practices regulations), progress and improvements for people living with dementia using aged care services have been inconsistent. Workforce shortages, financial constraints on providers, and the impacts of COVID-19 have delayed implementation of other critical reforms. Dementia-specific issues, such as workforce training, access to respite, and specialist dementia care, remain largely unaddressed.

b) the state of the aged care systems since the Royal Commission's final report?

Aged care remains difficult to navigate, particularly for people with dementia and their carers.

Workforce training is still inadequate, with carers reporting that staff often lack dementia-specific knowledge.

Dementia Australia is receiving increasing reports of people living with dementia who exhibit changed behaviours being sent to hospital or acute care settings, often due to aged care providers struggling to manage their needs. There are growing concerns regarding security of tenure, as some providers are refusing to accept residents back from hospital, leaving people with dementia displaced and without appropriate long-term care options.

c) positive/negative changes to the aged care system following government reform?

Positive changes:

- Increased funding for residential aged care has improved services in some areas.
- Care Finders and Aged Care Specialist Officers have provided some additional support in certain regions.
- The intent behind the introduction of star ratings was to improve transparency for consumers when selecting aged care services. However, there are concerns about their execution and whether the ratings accurately reflect the quality of dementia care and capture meaningful indicators of care for people living with dementia.

Negative changes:

- Respite care access remains difficult, with many providers limiting eligibility.
- Rural and remote areas have seen little to no improvement in dementia-specific aged care.
- Limited awareness of Care Finders Program and dementia support pathways
- The dementia support pathways initiative has not been widely promoted or integrated effectively into primary care.
- The implementation of the AN-ACC funding model does not appear to provide sufficient incentives for providers to accept people with dementia, particularly those with changed behaviours.

Consultation, transparency, and support for transition

Some consultations have been challenging for people living with dementia and their carers to access due to short timeframes or inaccessible materials. For example, consultations on the Aged Care Act Rules lacked an Easy English consultation paper, creating barriers to participation. Additionally, awareness of some new initiatives, such as dementia support pathways, remains low.

The complexity of the system means reforms remain difficult to track.

Rights-based, person-centred care

There is little evidence that reforms have yet fundamentally shifted aged care from a provider-driven system to one that prioritises individual rights and needs. However, we acknowledge that this will take time to achieve and are hopeful that the implementation of the new Act will further promote this outcome.

The emphasis on person-centred care is not matched by practical workforce training and service design improvements. We remain concerned that the funding model for Support at Home program is overly medicalised and transactional, and will limit the opportunity to provide flexible, social, and independence-supporting care for people with dementia. Essential independence supports such as social engagement, transport, and home assistance are classified as 'non-clinical' and subject to means testing, despite being necessary care to support people living with dementia to remain at home.

Recommendations:

- Mandatory dementia training for all aged care staff.
- Ensure the Support at Home reforms provide greater flexibility in home care to meet the needs of people with dementia, including access to both clinical and non-clinical supports essential for maintaining independence..
- More investment in services tailored to people with changed behaviours.

Inclusivity and equity in aged care

People with dementia from diverse backgrounds (CALD, First Nations, LGBTQIA+, rural/remote) still experiencing significant barriers in accessing appropriate aged care services, including culturally appropriate dementia care.

Dementia care remains an "add-on" rather than an integral part of aged care system design. Quality dementia care must be core business for aged care providers.

Recommendations:

- Increase availability of culturally appropriate and culturally safe dementia care.
- Address the digital divide to improve access to services in rural and remote areas.
- Increase representation of diverse communities in aged care workforce training and policy development.

5. Consumer understanding and access

Awareness of new consumer tools, such as Star Ratings and Care Finders, is low. Care Finders have had some impact but are not well-known or accessible in all areas.

The complexity of My Aged Care continues to be a major barrier, especially for people with cognitive impairments.

Recommendations:

- More accessible and dementia-friendly information about aged care options.
- GP engagement to improve referrals to dementia support services.
- Provision of dementia care navigators to support people living with dementia to access the aged care system and services.

Regulation and accountability

There are concerns that the impact of incidents is being minimised in the Serious Incident Response Scheme (SIRS) reporting, potentially underrepresenting the experiences of people living with dementia. Dementia Australia acknowledges the work of the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission in improving reporting accuracy to ensure incidents are appropriately documented and responded to.

There are concerns that regulatory reforms are not addressing key dementia care challenges, such as chemical restraint and staff training gaps. We remain hopeful that the Strengthened Aged Care Quality Standards will address these issues and continue to advocate for

mandatory dementia education to address the insufficient dementia capability of the aged care workforce.

Recommendations:

- Mandatory dementia education as part of accreditation for aged care providers.
- Improved data collection and monitoring of outcomes for people with dementia in SIRS.

Support at Home

Dementia Australia continues to be concerned that the funding structure and policy settings of the new Support at Home service model may unintentionally adversely affect people living with dementia.

The lower subsidy basis for non-clinical care may disadvantage people living with dementia, for whom independence and everyday living services are essential care and reduce the likelihood of premature entry to residential aged care. For more detail on this issue see the submissions Dementia Australia has in relation to **Support at Home Funding, Pricing Approach for the Support at Home Service List** and **Aged Care Rules Service List**.

Conclusion

While the Government has undertaken significant aged care reforms, people living with dementia remain disadvantaged due to gaps in funding, access, workforce training, and regulatory oversight. Without urgent action to address these concerns, we will continue to see systemic failures for people living with dementia in the aged care system. Dementia Australia welcomes further consultation with the Inspector-General of Aged Care on these critical issues.