

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into 'Caring for Older Australians'.

Firstly, this is the story from the receiving end of the system of a 91 year old increasingly fragile lady and her 68 year old carer.

My mother has frequent falls and her doctor has said she is not fit to continue living on her own. I've now been caring for her for the past 17 months. Due to a number of quite serious health problems of my own, my doctor has said I shouldn't be trying to care for my mother on a long term basis, and there would be times when I'd be unable to care for her at all. Consequently we started the process of looking for a suitable permanent placement in an Aged Care facility for her. This was not an easy decision, but what we are going through in actually getting either support or a placement has made it even more difficult for both of us.

Step one of course was obtaining an ACAT Assessment for her. This proved to be a very large step indeed, as it took approximately 9 months from application to the time of the actual assessment. Whenever my mother rang to query the delay, she was told that as she had a carer, her need wasn't considered a priority and she would just have to wait her turn. Eventually, following a phone call from her doctor, a date was arranged and she was assessed two months ago as being the high end of low care. Since then her mobility has deteriorated even further.

In the meantime I sought help as advised from the appropriate local Health Service regarding help to make day to day living within the home safer and easier for both of us. Phone calls went to answering machines and, as requested, messages were left with our name and phone number to be called back. After a number of calls over some weeks and no response, it again took a message from the doctor to get any help from this department.

Finally we managed to have a visit from an occupational health therapist who was very helpful with suggestions on the day. The bathroom rails and assistance he advised were duly and quite promptly installed. However, despite follow up phone calls from myself regarding the other things that he assured us were necessary and would happen, it is now over two months later and we've neither heard nor seen any more from that department. Nothing more has happened.

Then there is accessing either respite or a permanent residency in an Aged Care facility. Neither can happen until after that necessary ACAT Assessment. So as a consequence of the big delay in the ACAT Assessment, there's been a corresponding big delay in being able to apply at suitable facilities.

Now that the applications can finally be made, we are constantly told that there is very high demand and that it could be a very long time before a place is available. Meanwhile we are faced with the paperwork.....some of which is complex and difficult to understand. I ask the question as to why every Aged Care facility has to have totally different application forms?

Some of the explanatory material handed out is also rather confusing, especially in regards to the financial aspects of residency. I must add, however, that the fact sheets downloadable from the Government website are very user friendly and do make things a whole lot clearer.

The whole process is proving overwhelmingly difficult and stressful for both my mother and myself.

I submit the following .....

ACAT Assessments should be available within a very short period of time to all who are in need of them, even when they have a carer. Carers often have their own health problems.

Admission Forms for Aged Care Facilities should have a standardised format, and the sections to be completed by the staff at particular facilities made very clear.

Health Services need to follow through on what they have said they will do promptly.