SUPPORT AT HOME SURVEY

PRELIMINARY REPORT

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Endorsed by the
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PRELIMINARY REPORT

ABOUT

The Support at Home Program is one of the most important issues currently affecting older Australians who wish to remain living independently. For retirement village residents, the issue is especially important. Many residents want to continue living in their own home, in their own community, with appropriate support as their needs change.

The Support at Home changes introduced in November 2025 have created both hope and uncertainty. Some residents see the program as essential to maintaining independence. Others are concerned about delays, costs, unclear information, difficulty comparing providers, and uncertainty about what services will be available when they need them.

The Retirement Village Residents Associations around Australia have received many questions and concerns from residents about the new funding arrangements. Residents want to know how to apply, what they may be eligible for, how assessments work, what they may need to pay, and whether services will be available in practice. There is also a broader question about the role of retirement villages in keeping residents living independently.

In response, the NSW RVRA conducted an online survey to hear directly from retirement village residents about their experiences, concerns and views.

SURVEY

In consultation with Residents Associations from NSW, QLD, VIC, TAS, SA, WA and ACT an online survey was developed and distributed to residents of retirement villages across Australia. The survey was conducted during a three-week period in May/June 2026.

The anonymous survey included quantitative and qualitative questions about residents' understanding and experiences with the Support at Home program. It obtained feedback on wait times, availability and evaluation of services, and recommendations for improvement.

RESULTS

Sample

A total of 2,451 residents responded to the survey, providing detailed answers to the survey questions, and over 8,800 written comments that offer a detailed picture of their experiences, concerns and suggestions in relation to the Support at Home Program.

This preliminary report provides a snapshot of the key findings of the survey. The final detailed report will be available in August 2026.

Within the final sample of 2,451 respondents, all states were represented, with 60% female, 40% male, and the majority aged between 70 and 89 years. Almost equal proportions reported living alone or with a spouse or partner. The sample included full and part pensioners and self-funded retirees. Residents were at different stages of aged care support, from not currently needing services through to receiving support under CHSP, the old Home Care Package, or the new Support at Home program.

Summary

Overall, the survey findings show that retirement village residents broadly support the purpose of the Support at Home program: helping older people remain safely and independently at home. Many residents valued the assistance they received, particularly practical help, good providers and supportive case managers.

At the same time, many residents raised concerns about how the program works in practice. Many did not feel they understood the program well, particularly the support levels, available services, costs and where to get help.

The application and transition processes were often described as confusing, stressful and difficult to manage without assistance. Long waiting times were also a recurring concern. While many residents were satisfied with their providers and services, others reported communication problems, service gaps, rising costs and reduced supports.

The central message is that residents want Support at Home to succeed, but they need a system that is clearer, faster, more affordable and better matched to the practical realities of ageing at home.

The results also show that retirement village living can support independence through social connection, nearby neighbours, safer and more manageable housing, emergency reassurance and reduced maintenance responsibilities.

The remainder of this report presents a snapshot of the findings around a series of key research questions, each focusing on a major aspect of residents' understanding, experiences and concerns about the Support at Home program.

Who completed the survey?

The boxes below summarise the demographic characteristics of survey respondents.

2,451 respondents

Gender

Female	60%
Male	40%

Age group

50 - 69	5%
70 - 79	39%
80 - 89	50%
90 and above	6%

Living situation

Live alone	51%
Live with spouse/partner	48%
Live with family member	0.7%
Live with carer	0.2%

State

NSW	36%
Victoria	20%
Western Australia	16%
South Australia	13%
Queensland	11%
ACT	3%
Tasmania	2%

Government pension status

Age Pension (full)	36%
Age Pension (part)	32%
Self-funded retiree	29%
Non-government pension	3%

Q1. How well do residents understand the Support at Home program?

Residents were asked how well they understood the Support at Home program overall, the 8 support levels, the services available, and where to get information or help.

Understanding of the program

37% rated their overall understanding as poor or very poor

48% rated their understanding of the 8 support levels as poor or very poor

36% rated their understanding of available services as poor or very poor

31% rated their understanding of where to get information as poor or very poor

Many residents did not feel they had a good understanding of the program, the 8 levels, and the services available

What the results suggest

The results suggest that many residents are uncertain about how the program works.

Understanding was weakest for the new eight support levels.

Lack of understanding may make it harder for some residents to apply for support, choose providers, or know what help is available.

Comments

Older folk cannot look up technology for information. there is a need for non-rambling, clear information in mailing or information sessions on all aspects of assistance.

The whole process seems too complicated. There seems to be too many levels of bureaucracy. I am not sure who is who.

Comments

I think for those who do not have a high level of education and know how systems work, it is hard....people who most need these services do not understand the processes or the language. I do hope this can be addressed as I see many people who have expressed a desire to access the services they need but cannot.

Key message: Many residents supported the idea of Support at Home, but a substantial proportion said the program was difficult to understand.

Q2. How confusing or stressful was the application process?

Residents were asked how stressful and how confusing they found the application process, whether they needed help from family or friends to apply, and, for those who transitioned from a Home Care Package, how difficult and confusing that transition was.

Stress and confusion

46% found the application process moderately to extremely stressful

44% found the application process moderately to extremely confusing

30% needed help from family or friends to apply

46% found the transition from a Home Care Package moderately to extremely stressul

For many residents, applying for support was confusing and stressful.

What the results suggest

The application process was stressful and confusing for many residents.

Some residents needed help from family or friends just to get through the process.

The comments suggest that complexity, poor communication and difficult life circumstances made the process harder.

Comments

It feels so embarrassing to lay your life out for someone else to judge whether you deserve this help.

It's been such a stressful time of late that to discuss personal things with a stranger, who really, really tried to be empathetic, but still so difficult for me.

Comments

I have given up !!!

The system is very frustrating - you can be assessed and told that you are eligible for services and then you have to try and find providers to provide the services you are eligible for - VERY difficult for a lot of older people.

Key message: Many residents found the application process confusing and stressful. Some needed clearer guidance and personal support to get through it.

Q3. How long did residents wait to receive services?

Residents were asked how long they waited for assessment by My Aged Care, how long they waited for approval after assessment, and how long they waited to receive services from a provider.

Waiting times

30% waited 7+ months for assessment

24% waited 7+ months for approval

28% waited 3+ months for services

9% waited 7+ months for services

Delays often meant going without help for too long.

What the results suggest

Many residents waited months at several stages of the process.

Waiting was longest for assessment and approval, but delays in starting services were also common.

The comments suggest that long waits often left residents without practical help when they needed it.

Comments

It seemed to take an inordinate amount of time to get assessed .... the waiting time was very misleading and was much longer than I was originally told.

Frustration (especially after shoulder operation) of not being able to get approved services 30 mths later

It took more than 18 mths for the assessment and release of funds.

Comments

The biggest problem is obtaining timely assessments. The second biggest problem is waiting for service delivery. Both can be improved with proper funding from Govt. Even though I'm self-funded I have paid my taxes and believe the Govt has a clear responsibility to ensure the aged are well cared for.

It takes a long time to be assessed and receive the services. You could be dead by the time you receive it.

Key message: Many residents faced lengthy waits for assessment, approval and services. These delays often meant going without support when it was needed.

Q4. How satisfied were residents with their provider?

Residents were asked how satisfied they were with their provider, communication, and the services they received. They were also asked whether they could obtain all the services they required from their provider, whether services were unavailable, and whether they paid privately for some services.

Satisfied with provider

64% were satisfied with their current provider

58% were satisfied with provider communication

75% were satisfied with the services they received

24% could not obtain all the services they required

Many residents valued good care, but access and communication problems remained.

What the results suggest

Many residents were satisfied with their provider and with the services they received.

However, provider communication was less positive, and some residents could not obtain all the services they needed.

The comments suggest that service gaps and rising costs remained important concerns.

Comments

I have been on the Program since Aug 2025 and my family and friends have noticed an improvement in my mental health ...having providers for Physio and social support has lifted a load off my shoulders and I am happier and more connected. The people who come in to my home are delightful and have become almost like friends which has helped my mental and physical health.

Comments

The constant change of cleaners is a big problem. Older people do not want different helpers all the time. Elderly people want consistent times, days and cleaners each week.

Most providers I contacted were confusing to deal with. Most did not want to know my needs but were more concerned about what services they could provide to maximise their percentage of the Government money.

Key message: Many residents were satisfied with their provider, but service gaps, communication issues and rising costs remained important concerns.

Q5. Could residents obtain the services they needed?

Residents were asked whether they could obtain all the services they required from their provider, whether there were services they needed that were not available, whether they paid privately for some services, and how well their current care needs were being met.

Getting the services they needed

24% could not obtain all the services they required

26% said there were services they needed that were not available from their provider

27% paid privately for some services

64% said their care needs were being met well or very well

Many residents were getting some support, but important gaps remained.

What the results suggest

Many residents were receiving at least some of the support they needed.

However, around one in four could not obtain all the services they required, or said needed services were unavailable.

The comments suggest that provider availability, workforce shortages and rising costs left some residents without the help they needed.

Comments

I have already stopped some services, owing to the fact there is not enough in my budget for things I need. I have also had to reduce other services which I desperately need, such as: Speech Pathology (I choke and I have other problems in that area) and Physiotherapy (to assist with my balance).

Comments

I can no longer access massage as pain management... cannot get meals delivered, cannot go to balance classes, unable to get nutrition support supplements and taxi access significantly reduced.

Some services we were receiving before the changeover were withdrawn and we had to pay for them out of pocket from pension which we couldn't afford.

Key message: Many residents were able to access some support, but a substantial number could not obtain all the services they needed, and some paid privately to fill the gaps.

Q6. Does living in a retirement village help residents live independently for longer?

Residents were asked whether living in a retirement village helps them stay independent for longer, whether they had to seek help from other residents, and whether support from other residents reduced their need for government-funded support services.

Living in a retirement village

91% said village living helps them stay independent for longer

49% said it helps very much

25% had sought help from other residents

9% said support from other residents reduced their need for government-funded support

Retirement village living clearly supported independence, but was not a substitute for formal care.

What the results suggest

Most residents felt that village living helped them remain independent for longer.

Residents valued community, safety and nearby support.

However, support from other residents was usually seen as an extra source of help, not a replacement for formal aged care services.

Comments

I am surrounded by caring neighbours. Without being intrusive we all do small things to help each other.

Maintenance attended to, on site handyman to help with tasks, security, social interaction if required, Villa purpose built for the aged, life in general so much easier on a day-to-day basis.

Comments

I value my independence and ability to manage my own affairs. I find the friendship and proximity of other residents gives me a sense of community and alleviates a feeling of isolation which one can feel when living alone in a suburban location.

Key message: Most residents said living in a retirement village helps them stay independent for longer, but informal neighbour support does not replace the need for funded support services.

Q7. What were residents' opinion of the Support at Home program?

Residents were asked to describe their overall opinion of the Support at Home program.

1,817 written responses

Positive themes

- Generally positive opinion
- Good idea in principle
- Supports independence, wellbeing and staying at home
- Better compared with the past
- Current support or provider is working well

Negative themes

- Poor policy design, bureaucracy, unfairness, transition concerns
- Costs, affordability, out of pocket charges
- Confusing, complex, unclear, or poorly explained
- Provider availability, quality, billing or accountability problems
- Services, funding or package level do not meet needs
- Delays, waiting list or slow access

Positive comments were brief and focused on the value of the support that helps people remain at home. Negative comments were detailed, focusing on costs, confusion, delays, provider problems and concern that the program does not meet people's needs.

Positive comments

> *It is a great help for people who need assistance to live independently.*
>
> *I feel that this program is very important to senior citizens allowing them to stay in their own home longer.*
>
> *I am and have been for many years very thankful for the help I have received, particularly when my health has not been good. Knowing that there is someone who can be relied on for support at those times is priceless.*

Negative comments

> *The new rules are making it harder for people to access and receive support at home due to costs and waiting times, unfair treatment of people who have worked all their lives and now have to pay high costs to stay at home.*
>
> *Looks ok on paper, totally hopeless in reality because you just can't get the services offered at a reasonable or comparative price if you are a self funded retiree.*

Q8. How did residents think the Support at Home program could be improved?

Residents were asked to describe any changes they thought would improve the Support at Home program.

1,817 written responses

Key Improvement Themes

Simplify information and explain things clearly

Residents want plain English information and clearer guidance about how the program works

Reduce waiting times and delays

Faster assessment, approval and service delivery were among the strongest requests

Lower costs and improve affordability

Residents want lower fees, fairer costs, and less financial pressure.

Increase services and package value

Many want broader service coverage and package levels to better match real needs.

Improve provider quality and choice

Residents want reliable providers, better communication and more consistent service quality.

Reduce bureaucracy and red tape

Many said the system was too complex and needs a simpler, more user friendly process.

Support a fair and smooth transition

Residents want clearer transition arrangements and fair treatment under the new system.

Comments

> *Cut the waiting times - people need help now, not in 12 months*
>
> *Make it simpler, explain things in plain English.*
>
> *Get rid of the AI assessment PLEASE - we are humans.*
>
> *Clear communication about how it works, especially about my out of pocket expenses.*

Comments

> *Make it affordable for pensioners and self-funded retirees.*
>
> *More transparency and accountability and a source of impartial information as to how I can self manage as I believe most of my funding is sucked up in administrative costs.*
>
> *Consider the end user when making decisions about a persons life and well being.*

What residents told us

On this page are some of the 8,800 written responses provided throughout the survey by residents. While some residents expressed support, the majority described problems, concerns, frustrations, and suggested improvements.

8,800 written responses

The "no-one will be worse off" was a lie. I'd be much, much worse off. While I can get bulk billing on medical issues it is not worth it.

I was totally lost mentally, husband had just passed away and I relied on the person interviewing me to give me direction throughout the entire process. I still do not understand the package or how it works.

Mainly concerned with actual cost associated with providers. Some providers costs are too high and convenient. Open to rorting the system. Example: Electric bed quoted approx. $9K when similar bed retails for under $6k.

Have the politicians live a day with an elderly person to see how they manage day to day.

The whole system and the implementation needs to be reviewed. It's not well thought out at all. I know there are areas of concern in the age care section of our society but the support at home program hasn't helped.

I appreciate what I have but this new system is badly designed & run - no one seems to know what can or can't be done. Scrap it & go back to the old system and tweak that.

It is a complete mess and all involved are not up to date on the program. The charging system is terrible and confusing.

Fund my own meals and continue using Uber services for certain personal trips, as designated companion drivers assigned by the provider cost a minimum of $75 per hour, whereas Uber charges an average of $22.

No money coming in. Desperate. 6 months since assessment.

I was too embarrassed to request help.

I am appreciative of my provider who are efficient and easy to deal with. Also appreciate the assistance that the Support at Home provides.

Right now I pray I will die before my body starts breaking down.

....why on earth it was thought OK to send inexperienced, young, men who were not at all professional and didn't seem to know much about housework or how to treat an expensive vacuum cleaner, who were more interested in bullying me to let them come when it suited them than as already arranged.... it made for such a sickening start that I nearly cancelled the whole thing!
YES I am an older person YES I am in need of help, which is difficult to acknowledge and ask for... but, this is MY HOME, my life that I am letting someone else into.

It's difficult enough without the horridness of being harangued on the phone, then turning up too early anyway, knocking on the door to be let in, not once looking up from their phone.

Poorly thought out and rushed. Its focus is on financial outcomes not care outcomes.

Needs to improve dramatically. Supposed to support the elderly to stay in their own homes yet there is no help to do so.

Somewhat lacking in compassion. People who don't have the ability to use or access a computer or have any type of dementia or poor hearing or poor eyesight and don't have someone to advocate for them is disadvantaged.

Extremely frustrating and confusing - I needed my daughter and son-in-law to navigate the system on my behalf

I have given up !!!

CONCLUSION

This survey shows that retirement village residents strongly support the goal of helping older people remain safely and independently at home, but many are struggling with the way the Support at Home program works in practice. The findings point to several clear challenges: the program needs to be easier to understand, quicker to access, more transparent in relation to costs, and better matched to residents' changing health and practical support needs.

Each of the state Resident Associations have a vital advocacy role to play. This survey gives residents a collective voice and provides evidence of how policy decisions affect older people in their daily lives. The goal should be a system that works with retirement villages and residents, not one that leaves older people to navigate complexity alone.

The implications extend beyond individual residents. Retirement villages can play an important role by providing information, helping residents navigate the system, identifying service gaps, and strengthening links with providers and local support services. However, informal help from neighbours or village communities should not be used as a substitute for properly funded aged-care support.

These findings should be used to inform politicians, government departments and aged-care decision-makers about the real impact of delays, confusion, costs and unmet need. The central message is that Support at Home must be designed and delivered around the lived realities of older people, not just around administrative systems.

FURTHER INFORMATION

This survey was conducted with the support and cooperation of each of the Residents Associations in Queensland, New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, and Western Australia.

For further information concerning this preliminary report, or the release of the main report in August, please contact:

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