



Portability of Home Care Packages Submission

Aged & Community Services WA Inc (ACSWA) is the peak body representing the church, charitable, and not-for-profit providers of residential and community care for older Western Australians in metropolitan, regional, rural and remote locations.

ACSWA is concerned to ensure that inequities with the current ACAR process for home care packages are resolved and is pleased to make this submission in support of alternate arrangements for the allocation of funding.

Executive Summary

ACSWA recently undertook a survey of home care package (HCP) provider members to inform the development of potential alternative ACAR models. The survey results strongly indicate that previous ACAR allocations of home care packages have been inappropriately dispersed, which has resulted in the limited number of Level 3 and 4's which assist consumers with more complex needs to remain living in the community. Specifically, 71% of HCP providers reported that the under-subscriptions of Level 1 and 2 packages and unmet demand for Level 3 and 4 packages is an ongoing concern for the sector.

A review of the 2014 ACAR data confirms that a total of 951 Level 1 packages were allocated nationally in comparison to 1,007 Level 4 packages, where there is significant unmet demand. It is believed consequently, that the allocation of Level 1 compared with Level 4 packages is impacting on the community care sector to the extent that providers risk under delivering on contractual outcomes or fail to meet consumer needs.

ACSWA believes that a solution is required in the interim that will enable the community care sector to rectify the imbalance of home care package levels nationally, noting the planned change announced by Government in the 2015 federal budget that funding will follow consumers from February 2017 and the consequent demise of the current ACAR process for HCPs after 2015.

ACSWA understands that Minister Fifield is aware of the HCP inequity and that he has encouraged industry to submit proposals on alternate solutions.

Accordingly, ACSWA strongly recommends that the Government should allow HCP providers to port the value of existing Level 1 and Level 2 packages to Level 3 and Level 4 packages. We believe this initiative will address the inappropriate distribution of home care packages announced in previous ACAR rounds and allow providers to meet consumer needs, and enable consumers to remain in their home environment rather than contemplate premature entry into residential care.

Background

The ACSWA survey was responded to by 71 per cent of the membership with HCPs, which represents 3,930 home care packages across WA. The inequity of the current system is highlighted by the 100 per cent under-subscription of Level 1 packages reported and the 50 per cent of respondents who maintain a wait list for Level 3 and Level 4 packages.

Qualitative evidence received from respondents includes a statement that “We still have about 10-15% of consumers that we could move from a Level 2 to a Level 3-4 package. Referrals that come to us now are often a Level 3 or 4 and we have been asked to take them on as a lower level as there is no level 3 or 4 available.”

Similarly, a national survey conducted by the Community Care Review and recently published emphasised this problem is consistent across the nation. The May 2015 edition notes that “Australia’s leading community care organisations indicate that occupancy rates for Level 1 packages nationally sit at 56 per cent, while occupancy for Level 4 packages is at 96 per cent.” Additionally, the Review noted one organisation that had a “large waiting list, more than 500 people, for Level 3 and 4 packages where we have full occupancy”.

Issues for Low Level HCPs

Respondents to the ACSWA Survey proffered reasons as to why there are such significant numbers of under-subscribed Level 1 and 2 home care packages. Some of the reasons put forward include:

- Deficiencies of ACAR system failing to appropriately distribute home care packages,
- Level 1 home care packages are perceived as duplication to HACC/CHSP services,
- Consumers are refusing Level 1 and 2 package care as they don’t feel that they are getting value for money, or opting out and returning to HACC/CHSP (which is perceived as better value for money),
- Less referral received from ACAT assessors for Level 1 and 2 packages.

Sector Support for Portability of Packages

ACSWA has received tremendous support from Member home care providers supporting the call for urgent action by the Government to enable the portability of Level 1 and Level 2 to higher level packages.

The Survey revealed that 92 per cent of ACSWA members confirmed they were highly likely, or likely to apply lower level packages to higher level packages, if permitted, which they see as solutions to resolving their under-subscription for Level 1 packages and meeting consumer demand for higher level packages.

ACSWA members commented that the portability of packages across Level 1 to Level 4, would benefit them and the consumer by enabling a great many more ‘outputs’ compared to the small Level 2 service delivery that results from a 90 per cent vacancy rate. Members were also confident that with portability arrangements they could support a larger number

of high care clients who may be currently sitting in a Level 2 or Level 3 package whilst they wait for a Level 4 to become available.

Anticipated Issues

ACSWA anticipates several issues with the introduction of the portability of packages that should be resolved by the Government prior to implementation.

Firstly, home care providers with a current allocation of Level 1 and 2 packages only, may be restricted within existing service contracts to deliver higher level packages of care.

Government should consider these providers capability for delivering higher level packages if they can demonstrate appropriate staffing levels, qualifications and quality of care to deliver Level 3 and 4 packages.

Secondly, it is anticipated that the majority packages ported would be Level 1's and that the highest level of over-subscription would be Level 3 or Level 4 packages where there is demonstrably greater demand. To achieve equity in respect of package value, providers would need to consider porting at least four Level 1 packages to equal the value of a Level 3 package (total \$31,288 in subsidy funding). Similarly providers would need to consider porting at least six Level 1 packages to equal the value of a Level 4 package (total of \$46,932 in subsidy funding).

Under these arrangements the total number of home care packages both within a jurisdiction and nationally would fall, but the overall total allocation of funding will remain the same. We strongly believe the benefits of these arrangements for Government, consumers and their carers will be increased efficiency and flexibility across home care packages in meeting consumer needs and reducing premature entry into residential care. The number of ported packages approved by the Government would also deliver reliable information of local need and demand for Level 3 and 4 packages within each jurisdiction and could inform future planning and development.

Recommendation

ACSWA strongly recommends that the Government should take urgent action to enable home care providers to port their Level 1 and 2 package care to higher level packages.