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Australian Government Department of Social Services
Via Online Submission

Submission – Increasing Choice in Home Care – Stage 1

The Illawarra Forum is the peak body working for community services and organisations in the Illawarra and the Shoalhaven. We support community organisations, promote expertise and innovation in community development, foster industry development and advocate for social justice.

For more than twenty years, the Illawarra Forum has taken a leadership role in the local community services sector, which is a major employment sector in the region, and currently consists of more than 300 organisations in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven areas of New South Wales.

As part of our leadership role, we engage with those organisations, services and individuals engaged in supporting community members aged over 65 years in both residential and community care settings at the local level to collect their opinion, expertise and recommendations. The experience of these practitioners in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven is very different to metropolitan Sydney.

The Illawarra Forum has reviewed the Discussion Paper and makes the following observations and recommendations:

The implementation of Home Care Packages will require a cultural shift in both consumers and in many of the approved providers and both groups will require adequate information and support in order to adapt to the changing environment.

Consumers will need access to information which enables them to make informed choices about both the services and the providers they use. In order to empower consumers, carers, families and advocates to take control of their package and to make informed choices, it is imperative that there are opportunities for education, training and support on the new model of care. Simply telling people that they have choice and control does not empower them, consumers require the tools and resources to equip them to be more involved.

It is important to recognize that not all consumers will be able to access this information online through the My Aged Care website. Therefore, this information must be available in a variety of formats to cater for consumers with special

communications needs, for example people with low literacy, people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, people with a visual impairment, and people who do not have internet access.

In addition to information about services, care plans, assessments, and budgets need to be accessible to a consumer and their representatives. The Illawarra Forum recommends that the cost of translating materials and interpreter services are built into the administration fee or that a supplement be developed to assist with these costs. If these costs are to be taken out of the package, people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities and people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities will be severely disadvantaged. As these two groups are considered special needs groups a supplement would be quite appropriate.

Sector support and development activities will be increasingly important to ensure service providers and staff have a thorough understanding of consumer directed care and individual package requirements. The Illawarra Forum recommends investment in support for organisations in education, training and up-skilling the workforce in the new model of support. Sector support and development activities must also be available to support organisations to expand to provide appropriate service to special needs groups, including people from LGBTI, CALD, and Aboriginal communities.

Prioritisation

Ideally all consumers in need of care should have access to packages as needed, but if prioritisation must be undertaken, the Illawarra Forum recommends that factors such as highest need, greatest risk and lack of other support should be the highest priority, also taking into account any geographic disadvantage. Consumers who live in rural and remote communities who have high needs and no outside support may be at greater risk than those who live in a community.

ACAT clinical staff are well placed to determine priority of need and whilst we understand that further resources would be required to allow ACATs to manage the waiting lists, we also believe it would be a cost effective solution. The Illawarra Forum recommends that ACATs be resourced and supported to re-introduce waiting list management processes.

Timeframe to Commence Care

If correct procedures are undertaken at the goal-setting and planning stage of the ACAT assessment, consumers should have already planned when and how they will commence care.

Interim Care Arrangements

The Illawarra Forum strongly recommends that all consumers should receive the level of care as assessed, and holds concerns regarding the ability to offer a lower band package to a consumer with approval for a higher band package.

There are two major concerns here, firstly the ability of the provider to deliver appropriate levels of support to a consumer, who by assessment has a higher level of need. The result could mean lower levels of clinical care or alternatively financial implications for the provider and the consumer in order to provide the required level of support. Secondly, the consumer may be disadvantaged when a higher level package does become available as they may not be seen as a priority due to the current provision of service.

Unspent funds when a consumer moves to a new provider or leaves subsidised home care

The Illawarra Forum recommends that where a consumer transfers to another provider, that all unspent funds are also transferred.

If a person leaves subsidised home care, the person's contribution should be returned to the person, or to their estate.

Consumer directed care

The Illawarra Forum has some concerns about the use of sub-contracted service providers where a provider of choice cannot provide a needed service type. In such cases where providers do broker that service out, the client should be properly informed of any potential additional expenses and the possibility of reduced supports to cover the brokerage costs.

Conclusion

The Illawarra Forum has welcomed the opportunity to comment on the Increasing Choice in Home Care – Stage 1 Discussion Paper. For further information please contact me at nicky@illawarraforum.org.au or by phone on 02 4256 4333.



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