

Government Cuts Financial Assistance, Seniors Clog Up Hospitals

Seniors in Brisbane & beyond are being forced to stay in hospitals instead of being given proper aged care, according to local government representatives in Queensland and other states and territories. This has prompted stakeholders to voice their concerns regarding key aged care issues in a senate inquiry recently. Other problems include under-utilization of nurses and suggestions to expand medicare-funded GP tele-health services.

The ACT Government talked to the [Senate Select Committee on Health](#) and told them that an average of 30 patients from public hospitals everyday need to have an access to aged care services. This delay in moving to aged care costs hospitals \$1,200 per day. The Canberra Hospital, for instance, has been experiencing a surge of aged care type patients for the past two years, while increase in the average length of stay has been felt too. The South Australian Government also stated in the senate hearing that patients who are overstaying in hospitals longer than clinically appropriate should be of primary concern.

[The termination in the Federal Budget of the National Partnership Agreement on Financial Assistance for Long Stay Older Patients last May had some serious effects on Australian states and territories.](#) This \$42 million initiative used to cover up for the costs of older patients who need longer stays in the hospital. The Queensland Government, in particular, told the inquiry that the Commonwealth Governments have fallen short of funding sufficient aged care beds, especially in rural and regional areas.

They further elaborated that people tend to overstay in hospitals because there are no aged care services available or they are waiting for their finances to get settled before they can move to nursing homes. In Cairns Hospital and Health Service region alone, there are around 60 to 70 beds currently occupied by overstaying older patients.

[The Australian Medical Association](#) pointed out to the inquiry that there is a need for the aged care sector to be properly recognised as a part of the health system and medical care sector. The significant numbers of doctors who are

soon retiring in Australia also pose some threats in the availability of workforce dedicated to aged care residents. This should be included in facility and health care planning.

The proposed GP co-payment

The [ACSA](#) and [LASA](#) alerted the inquiry about the possible negative effects of the proposed \$7 co-payment imposed to older people for their access to medical services. ACSA is concerned that not all older people can afford the \$7 Medicare co-payment and thus, making them skip their medical treatments. LASA also said that the co-payment process is an added task on aged care providers and will possibly incur significant cost.

ACSA's submission also called for falls prevention programs that should be implemented at a national level. The rate of falls and hospitalisations due to falls in Australia is increasing and this costs the government a whopping \$8.4 billion per year. The entire expenditure the government spends on aged care system is \$13 billion. According to ACSA, falls prevention programs would be a good public policy to reduce risks, especially now that people are living longer.