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# 'Unacceptable' failure: the algorithm denying aged care at home



By [Phoebe Loomes](#)

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[Aged care](#) recipients are being charged up to \$1000 more to receive [support in their home](#), as some politicians have lashed a government assessment "algorithm" as an "unacceptable" failure.

Danielle Corrie, a carer for her father, 94 told *The Senior* she had recently been quoted \$400 after requesting a long-handled dustpan and broom and a shoe horn through the Support at Home system.

Ms Corrie said she later found identical items on Amazon for half the price.

"Why are these suppliers not being challenged by providers on behalf of their vulnerable clients?" she said. "Excessive funding reduces the

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■ A group of 21 MPs, including Senator David Pocock, have called for urgent reforms to the government's Support at Home program.

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A care recipient in her 80s, who did not want to be named as she feared retaliation by her provider, told *The Senior* that a [recent overhaul of the aged care system](#) means her husband, who has a brain injury, has had to drastically reduce multiple elements of his care.

"It now is approximately \$1000 more for exactly the same service which obviously puts him over 'budget'," the woman from Brisbane's south said.

The woman, who managed the package for her husband, has since had to reduce his hours of social support, halve his exercise physiotherapy sessions to once a month, and reduce a weekly meal delivery to once a fortnight.



📷 Shadow Minister for Health and Aged Care Anne Ruston, left, has called on Aged Care Minister Sam Rae to overhaul the "broken" Support at Home system. Left picture by Rachael Webb, right picture by Keegan Carroll

More than 20 government MPs have written to the Albanese government urging immediate reform of the new system, which they say has triggered an "avalanche of concerns" and left people with incurable illnesses unable to access support.

In a joint letter signed by 21 politicians - including Barnaby Joyce, Zali Steggall, Allegra Spender and David Pocock - the cross-parliamentary group of MPs called for an overhaul.

"This is a damning indictment of the government's failed Support at Home rollout and the real harm it is causing vulnerable older Australians," Shadow Minister for Health and Aged Care Anne Ruston said.



📷 Author Danielle Corrie, said she was quoted \$400 for a long-handled dustpan and broom, and a shoe horn through Support at Home. Picture supplied

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## **'Flawed algorithm' sees vulnerable Australians miss out**

Under the new assessment algorithm, vulnerable Australians, including people with progressive illnesses like motor neurone disease and dementia were being denied support after being assessed by the Department's "algorithm", Ms Ruston said.

"It is unacceptable that Labor is allowing a flawed algorithm to determine what care an older Australian can receive," Ms Ruston said.

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The group has urged the government to ditch what it has labelled as a "broken algorithm" and restore human oversight, and for showers, bathing, dressing and continence management to the government-funded clinical care category, which would mean no recipient would go without.

"It is time that this government starts listening to older Australians and acts urgently to fix its broken system," Ms Ruston said.

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Independent senator David Pocock agreed, saying he had been "disturbed to hear such clear examples of people being gouged by their providers" in an Instagram post.

**Support is available for older people concerned about their care**

- Seniors Rights Service <https://seniorsrightsservice.org.au/>
- Older Persons Advocacy Network call 1800 700 600 or visit <https://opan.org.au/get-support/i-need-advocacy-support/>
- Elder abuse phone line call 1800 ELDERHelp or 1800 353 374

## **'Humans will always play the most crucial role': Government**

A spokesperson for Minister Sam Rae told *The Senior* the government was monitoring service prices and had told providers all their charges must be "reasonable" and justifiable.

"Our reforms have delivered a more transparent pricing model by capping care management fees and publishing pricing guidance online - preserving care budgets to be used for care, not for provider admin," the spokesperson said.

They stressed that "humans will always play the most crucial role in the assessment process" and are continuing to oversee assessments.

"Under the old system, we saw \$4 billion of funds unused - that's \$4 billion that could and should have been allocated to older Australians who could use those funds for care."

Kyle Olsen from the Older Person's Advocacy Network (OPAN) said in a recent webinar the peak body was actively advocating to government over concerns about the algorithm and the cost of care.

Under the Aged Care Act, providers can only charge "reasonable" prices that have been agreed to by the care recipient, and recipients can check their rights by using the network's [Self-Advocacy Toolkit](#).

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Anyone concerned about the cost of their package was encouraged to speak directly to their provider, and pursue formal complaints through the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission if they were not happy with the outcome.


## Are you having problems with Support at Home?

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Hi there, I'm Phoebe, journalist for The Senior based in Sydney. I'm interested in stories about lifestyle, personal finance and health.

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