

Questions taken on notice by Patricia Sparrow, Chief Executive Officer, Aged and Community Services Australia (ACSA)

Question	<p>Ms STITT: And you said that you received an additional \$205 million from the Federal Government. What was the shortfall? What did you ask for? I think you said that it was a per resident figure, but what was the global figure that you asked for and the shortfall?</p> <p>Ms SPARROW: We think that the way that the Government did it equated to it being a different payment in regional areas than in metropolitan areas, and I might need to actually get you those figures, because the way they were calculated was a little bit different. Would it be okay if I took that one on notice and came back to you about exactly how they translated them?</p>
PAEC Transcript page reference	4

Response:

ACSA joined with the other peak aged care bodies on 15 April 2020 to call for a package of urgent measures to keep safe the 1.3 million Australians cared for, and the 360,000 employed by, the aged care sector.

The measures called for were:

1. \$546 million to fund a \$15 increase in funding per resident per day for residential aged care homes for six months to meet increased direct care costs;
2. \$250 million to fund a \$10 increase in funding per home care recipient per day for home care providers for six months to meet increased direct care costs;
3. The establishment of a \$500 million pool of funds for information technology measures and training to reduce social isolation and loneliness;

The rescue package also called for:

1. A pandemic workforce fund to support staff forced to isolate and reduce infection risk to older Australians; and
2. Securing Refundable Accommodation Deposits and making improvements to the Aged Care Funding Instrument to keep providers financially viable and available for those who need them.

Further detail on the package can be accessed online here:

<https://acsa.asn.au/getattachment/bcda205e-63b9-4652-845c-24b8a32f57c1/COVID-19-aged-care-rescue-support-package.aspx>

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Question	Ms STITT: I have just got couple of questions on the workforce issue. You said that there is a workforce of 350 000 and you had been asking for some additional support, particularly around when people needed to self-isolate, and that obviously makes a lot of sense when you are dealing with an incredibly vulnerable cohort that these workers interact with. Ms SPARROW: Absolutely. Ms STITT: Was that in relation to both home care and residential care? Ms SPARROW: Yes, and the way we did it was, it sort of was an 'up to', and we did some calculations about what it might be if a percentage of the workforce was off at any period of time. I can send to you the rescue package that puts forward what that was. Ms STITT: Thank you.
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Response:

Part of the package of urgent measures called for by the coalition of aged care peak bodies was for a pandemic workforce fund to pay the salaries of self-isolating staff to address significant infection risk from both residential care and home care staff attending work for financial reasons.

This is in recognition of the fact that providers should be supported by government to pay our casual workers when they need to self-isolate. This will enable affected workers to stay away from the workplace and look after their own health without losing income, and crucially without exposing older residents/clients in their care or other workers to the virus.

In addition, it would also assist providers who need to bring in replacement staff to cover the work and shift of those who are self-isolating.

The package called for the fund to be demand driven and reflect the growth of COVID-19 in the community, based on an upper threshold of up to 30-35 percent of the workforce needing to take leave to self-isolate during the pandemic.

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Question	Mr RIORDAN: One thing that interests me greatly is you talked about the visiting pods in Geelong. I have not actually heard about that, but that was to me a very unique way. So is there something Government could perhaps be involved in? If we are worried about this type of pandemic in the future, is that something our aged-care sector needs to think about—how we might be able to maintain access with something like that? Ms SPARROW: Yes, I think so, and I think this particular one, which was down in Geelong, was Multicultural Aged Care Services. I think they were on the news. Maybe I can send you a link to that so you can see, because it really is quite impressive.
PAEC Transcript page reference	6

Response:

The 'Visitor Pods' established by Multicultural Aged Care Services, an ACSA member based in Geelong, were featured in the Geelong Advertiser.

The article can be accessed online at the following web address:

<https://www.geelongadvertiser.com.au/news/geelong/visitor-pod-reconnects-aged-care-residents-with-family-amid-coronavirus-restrictions/news-story/00054629e158017fe784e856ffa622e9>

The initiative was also featured on Channel Nine News, which can be viewed at the following web address:

<https://www.macs.org.au/macs-visitors-pod/>

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Question	Mr RIORDAN: Are you finding in this unusual time people who are perhaps progressing through their ratings in that because of the lack of visitors to their home who could perhaps report rapid deterioration or people—I think you identified—refusing to have people come by? Has there been difficulty in managing people's progression along the home care package funding sort of continuum, if you like? Ms SPARROW: I do not know if I can answer that question really clearly; it might be something that I need to take away again and have a look at.
PAEC Transcript page reference	7

Response:

There is inadequate data available at this stage to comprehensively assess whether the reduced delivery of care services to home care clients due to fears of the spread of COVID-19 has led to difficulty in managing clients' changing care and support needs.

ACSA members delivering home care have been working to screen and assess clients to ensure their needs can be met during the lockdown phase. They are also ensuring regular check-ins are occurring on clients throughout the pandemic, even if services have been reduced. These check-ins are important to ensuring any care needs that have progressed can be identified and managed.

The Government has also provided additional funding to consumer peak bodies to conduct welfare checks on clients who elected to suspend in-home care services during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹

Our members report that they experienced some 20% of their Home Care Package recipients ceasing or reducing services due to fears around the spread of COVID-19. Many of these recipients have since returned to previous service levels. Many home care recipients reported that they have experienced increased isolation and loneliness as a result of stay at home measures implemented in response to COVID-19.

The Commonwealth Department of Health produces quarterly reports containing key data on the operation of the Home Care Packages program, with the next report due in June, covering the first quarter of 2020. This will likely be the first opportunity we have to review the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on any changes to the utilisation patterns of Home Care Package recipients.

¹ <https://www.health.gov.au/ministers/senator-the-hon-richard-colbeck/media/welfare-checks-to-ensure-the-wellbeing-of-senior-australians>