

GENDER LENS ON THE 2024 BUDGET

Key policy in discussion	Aged care
Portfolio and or agency	Health and aged care
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Key author/s of this budget analysis:	Barbara Blundell, Curtin University
Chair, Social Policy Committee NFAW:	Prof. Helen Hodgson: h.hodgson@tpg.com.au

Key Portfolio Issues

- The 24-25 Budget measures are important to women in continuing the work of previous budgets on reforming the aged care economy to deal with the impact of gendered population ageing.
- The commitment to further wage increases and workforce development for aged care workers aligns with the Government's 2024 [*Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality*](#), though how this will be funded is not yet clear.
- This budget does not address needed aged care funding reforms to ensure the sustainability of the sector.

Budget Measures

\$2.2 billion over five years from 2023–24 has been budgeted to support the continuation of aged care reforms based on recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety ([*Budget Paper No. 2*](#), pp. 112-3). Funding includes:

- \$1.2 billion over five years from 2023–24 for aged care digital systems to ensure they are contemporary and legislatively compliant
- \$531.4 million for an additional 24,100 home care packages in 2024–25
- \$174.5 million over two years from 2024–25 for ICT infrastructure for the new Support at Home Program and Single Assessment System

The National Foundation for Australian Women is a feminist organisation, independent of party politics and working in partnership with other women's organisations. NFAW is dedicated to promoting and protecting the interests of Australian women, including intellectual, cultural, political, social, economic, legal, industrial and domestic spheres.

- \$110.9 million over four years from 2024–25 to increase the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission’s regulatory capability and to implement a new aged care regulatory framework from 1 July 2025
- \$65.6 million over four years from 2024–25 to attract and retain aged care workers, collect reliable data, and improve outcomes for people receiving aged care services through existing aged care workforce programs
- \$37.0 million over two years from 2024–25 to reduce wait times for the My Aged Care Contact Centre
- \$30.4 million over three years from 2024–25 to states and territories to continue to deliver the Specialist Dementia Care Program
- \$21.6 million over three years from 2024–25 to extend the Home Care Workforce Support Program for an additional three years
- \$11.8 million over three years from 2023–24 to implement the new Aged Care Act, including governance, program management, and extension of Aged Care Approvals Round
- \$10.8 million over two years from 2024–25 to extend the Palliative Aged Care Outcomes Program and the Program of Experience in the Palliative Approach program to upskill the aged care and primary care workforce and embed palliative care capacity in the aged care workforce
- \$7.8 million over two years from 2024–25 to support aged care service providers in thin markets to accommodate the new Australian National Aged Care Classification (AN-ACC) funding model
- \$4.1 million over three years from 2023–24 for ICT to configure the new Basic Care Tariffs in the AN-ACC funding model
- \$1.7 million in 2024–25 for the Australian Dementia Network for developments in biomarkers and disease-modifying therapies.

Additional Funding is also provided under the Strengthening Medicare program to support older Australians in hospital. This has been developed in consultation with the states and territories and includes:

- \$610.4 million over four years from 2024–25 for states and territories to invest in initiatives that address long stay older patient challenges, unique to each jurisdiction
- \$190.0 million over three years from 2025–26 for the extension and redesign of the Commonwealth’s Transition Care Programme to provide short-term care of up to 12 weeks for older people after a hospital stay
- \$56.8 million over five years from 2023–24 for the expansion of the Commonwealth’s successful Acute to Residential Care Transition Service dementia program to transition long-stay patients with behavioural psychological symptoms of dementia out of hospital into a residential aged care home

- \$24.9 million over two years from 2024–25 for the continuation of the Comprehensive Palliative Care in Aged Care program to support states to deliver specialist palliative care services in residential aged care ([Budget Paper No. 2](#), pp. 126).

Unspent funds from the Commonwealth Home Support Programme will be reprioritised to other sub-programs within aged care services over five years from 2023–24. Partial funding has already been provided for this measure. The commencement date of the new Aged Care Act has been deferred to 1 July 2025.

Aged Care

Payments (\$m)

	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
Services Australia	0.2	85.5	49.5	12.3	12.1
Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission	-	97.5	3.5	-	-
Australian Digital Health Agency	-	7.5	6.0	-	-
Department of the Treasury	-	-	-	-	-
Department of Health and Aged Care	-16.0	1,277.3	596.8	37.6	7.3
Total — Payments	-15.8	1,467.9	655.9	49.9	19.4

Source: 2024-25 [Budget Paper No. 2](#), Table: Improving Aged Care Support, page 112

Gender implications of this budget measure

Ageing, aged care and aged caregiving are gendered. Non-Indigenous [life expectancy](#) for females is currently 85.4 years, 4.1 years longer than non-Indigenous males. Life expectancies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are significantly lower, with women having a life expectancy of 75.6 years, four years longer than First Nations men. There are currently around [1.3 million](#) older Australians accessing aged care services, and women comprise a [larger proportion](#) of the oldest people using aged care, and over the past decade, women have [consistently used more aged care services](#) than men, though the proportion of men using aged care has been increasing over time. Of the [370,000 aged care workers](#) in Australia, [approximately 86 per cent](#) are women, with [72 per cent of these part-time](#) workers. Women are [2.5 times](#) more likely than men to be a primary carer, and informal caregivers are less likely to be in employment, and more likely than men to reduce their hours, limit their career progression, and leave the workforce to accommodate caring responsibilities, which [directly impacts their assets, savings, and superannuation](#). This year’s aged care budget measures focus on increasing access to home care, improving the quality and regulation of aged care services, and addressing workforce issues. These budget measures will benefit women who are care recipients as well as the vast majority of the aged care workforce.

Older women who are care recipients

The \$110.9 million for the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission will help ensure higher standards of quality and consistency in care. Funding for the My Aged Care Contact Centre (\$37 million) is allocated to reduce wait times, and \$531.4 million for an additional 24,100 home care packages in 2024–25 has also been allocated for this purpose. Though waiting lists have reduced in recent years due to increased funding of home care packages post-Royal Commission, demand for services remains high, with over [51,044 people](#) remaining on the waitlist at the end of 2023 and those waiting for Level 3 packages having an expected wait time of [9-12 months](#). Some of the issues have resulted from challenges in finding providers with the capacity to provide the services, and this can be heightened in rural and remote areas. There has been \$7.8 million allocated to support thin markets and access to equitable care across different regions, which may benefit women in rural and remote areas. \$2.2 billion of the aged care budget is not new and has been found from consolidated revenue and the reprioritisation of unspent funds from the Commonwealth Home Support Programme over five years from 2023–24 to other sub-programs within aged care services.

The new Aged Care Act has been deferred until 1 July 2025. This Act was the number one recommendation from the Royal Commission as a measure [to enshrine service users' rights in legislation and provide certainty and security around access to quality care](#) and the costs of care. The proposed legislation is expected to be introduced into Parliament in September or October 2024. It is likely that the new Act will include funding reforms and may potentially direct a greater share of the costs to users of care services, pending the consideration of recommendations from the [Aged Care Taskforce final report](#).

Women who are care workers

The Government has committed to funding the Fair Work Commission's decision to award a further 13.5 per cent increase in aged care workers' wages, building on the 15 per cent wage increase last year. Government support of cumulative wage increases acknowledges the critical role women play in this sector. The [main beneficiaries of this will be women](#), many of whom are part-time, and a sizable proportion from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds ([35 per cent in residential and 21 per cent in home care](#)). How this wage increase will be funded has not been confirmed.

The investment of \$65.6 million over four years to attract and retain aged care workers and improve workforce outcomes is likely to improve job satisfaction, training, and career development opportunities for the predominantly female workforce. The \$21.6 million investment in the Extending the Home Care Workforce Support Program will further bolster the support and training for female home care workers. Though these measures are positive for women, the pending wage rise has been [critiqued](#) as putting increased pressure on aged care providers.

Aged Care expenditure is expected to increase by around 35 per cent to a total of \$190 billion over the four years. The 24-25 budget avoids making decisions around the long-term viability of aged care funding and the Aged Care Taskforce Final report recommendations, which are critical to the sustainability of aged care sector, [are not referenced in the budget](#).

Women who are informal caregivers

There are no specific aged care measures [relating to carers](#) in the Budget, though informal carers will benefit from the funding of additional Home Care Packages and other measures supporting palliative and dementia care, as these may alleviate some of their caregiving burdens.

The additional funding to support older Australians being discharged from hospitals may help to alleviate the care burden by providing additional formal care in the transition out of the hospital system to home or residential care. The program must be designed to ensure that the needs of carers as well as care recipients are taken into consideration.

Recommendations

NFAW calls for:

- Sufficient funding in future budgets to meet the growing demands of an ageing population, which disproportionately affects women both as recipients and providers of care. Funding has increased over recent years, but the sector is still seen to be [underfunded](#).
- Further funding to increase the number of available Home Care Packages to address continuing wait list issues. This should be targeted to address areas of challenge to improve equity and availability, such as service provision and recruitment in rural and remote areas.
- A continued focus on enhancing job security, benefits, and career progression for part-time aged care workers. Wage increases will help elevate the desirability of work in the sector, but the predominance of part-time roles for female workers will impact their financial stability and career growth.
- Sustainable funding for the sector in terms of aged care workers' wage increases but also fees and service charges, taking into account the recommendations of the Aged Care Taskforce final report to support the long-term viability of the sector.