

Higher Everyday Living Fees (HELF)



What older people, their families and support network need to know about optional fees in residential aged care

What is HELF?

The **Higher Everyday Living Fee (HELF)** is an optional fee for extra services in residential aged care that go beyond the standard care and services every resident is entitled to. HELF replaces the previous Extra Service Fee and Additional Service Fee.

- The provider sets the price for each HELF service.
- HELF cannot be charged for accommodation.
- All residents receive standard care and services under the Aged Care Quality Standards and the [Service List](#), whether they pay HELF or not.
- Residents cannot be charged for a service they do not want, use, or agree to.

Bundled services – your rights

OPAN continues to hear concerns about bundled charges for basic services, such as free-to-air TV, telephone and internet, and about a lack of transparency in how bundles are priced.

The following apply to bundled services:

- A bundle is a combination of services provided together and charged as a group.
- Providers can offer a bundle, but residents are **not required** to accept them.
- A bundle can include a service a resident cannot use, but residents **must not end up worse off** by paying for services they cannot use.
- Every service in a bundle must also be available to purchase individually.

HELF agreement protections

HELF must be set out in its own agreement, called a **Higher Everyday Living Agreement (HELA)**, which is separate from the accommodation and service agreement. A provider cannot charge HELF **unless there is a HELA in place**. The agreement must identify the services, cost, standard, frequency and charging method. There are two types:

- **Standing (written) agreement** – for services planned and agreed in advance, such as ongoing Wi-Fi, a term of yoga classes, or a one-off haircut. This must be in writing.
- **Ad-hoc agreement** – for a single, unplanned service requested at the time it is delivered, such as a coffee at an onsite café. These can be agreed verbally. Providers are encouraged to use standing agreements wherever possible.

Key protections that apply to every HELA:

- A HELF cannot be agreed or charged before a resident has entered care and cannot be made a condition of entry or used to secure a room. Information can be provided prior to or on entry as to what may form a HELF (e.g. what services or bundles are available).
- The HELA must be signed separately and only after the service and accommodation agreement has been signed.
- A 28-day cooling-off period applies after signing, during which the resident can cancel or change the agreement.
- Every HELA must be reviewed at least once a year.
- A provider cannot start charging for a service that used to be included – such as a bus outing or a ‘club’ menu.
- HELF cannot be forced on a resident, and a resident cannot be charged for a service they do not want or will not use. Any charge for a service previously included must go through a HELF agreement, with the consumer protections above – it cannot simply be imposed.

OPAN’s position

OPAN is not opposed to optional extras in aged care – but strongly believes they must never become a barrier to necessary care, dignity, or genuine choice.

OPAN continues to hear questions and concerns from older people, their families and support network about the distinction between ‘standard’ care and ‘optional’ HELF services.

OPAN, along with other peak bodies representing older people, are calling for:

- Clear national guidance on standard services and HELF-eligible extras.
- Free or low-cost access to television and basic internet as standard inclusions, not optional fees. It is an important source of connection, particularly for residents with low mobility.
- Action to prevent HELF from creating a two-tiered aged care system, so that quality of life is not determined by ability to pay.
- No charges for services and activities that were previously free or are delivered by volunteers (e.g. choirs).
- Consistent enforcement of HELF consumer protections, including cooling-off rights, separate agreements, bundling rules, and a clear consent process with protection for people with limited decision-making support.

For free and confidential information
call our Aged Care Advocacy Line:



1 800 700 600



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