MEDIA RELEASE

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NEW REPORT: AGED CARE ADVOCACY CASES UP 25%, OLDER PEOPLE LOST IN COMPLEX SYSTEM

Older people are feeling lost in a complex aged care system with demand for advocacy support rising to record levels, a new report from the Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN) has found.

OPAN today released its sixth annual *National Aged Care Advocacy Program (NACAP) Presenting Issues Report*, which analyses the 64,787 instances of information and advocacy support delivered by the network's nine members during the 2025-26 financial year – a 23.4% increase on the previous year.

The report covers one of the most significant periods of reform to the aged care system, with the rights-based *Aged Care Act 2024* coming into effect on 1 November 2025.

Two major reforms, the Support at Home program and the Single Assessment System, were identified as the primary drivers of the increase in demand for advocacy support.

OPAN CEO Craig Gear said the findings serve as an important reminder that legislative change alone does not improve the lives of older people.

"Rights on paper are just the first step. Unfortunately, the report has shown us that implementation challenges, in many cases, have limited the intended benefits of these reforms," Mr Gear said.

"Older people have told us that barriers to accessing services remain, and their struggle to navigate a complex system undermines their rights within the new Act.

"Meaningful reform takes time. But we cannot lose sight of the very real human impact on older people who, at times, are dying while waiting for support."

Mr Gear said the significant demand for support, which has increased by 40% in total over the past two financial years, reflects the scale of change underway and the challenges older people face navigating that change.

The report identified two key themes emerging from the issues raised.

The first was a systemic lack of responsibility for supporting older people to navigate the system and access aged care**.**

"Older people are feeling lost within the aged care system. Many struggle to navigate multiple services, agencies and processes – often being passed from one service to the next, with no one claiming responsibility for supporting them," Mr Gear said.

"Issues raised about the Integrated Assessment Tool (IAT) are deeply concerning. In particular the removal of human assessor override functions, and reports that the IAT is not adequately capturing older people's aged care needs or the urgency of those needs."

The second key theme related to the implementation of the Support at Home program, which replaced Home Care Packages when the new Act was introduced.

“Older people are continually raising concerns about rising costs, reduced services and inadequate care management,” Mr Gear said.

“Those who transitioned from Home Care Packages are telling advocates they feel worse off, despite assurances that they would be financially protected.”

Mr Gear acknowledged the report was confronting, but it provides important insight into older people’s experiences as major aged care reforms were being implemented.

“It’s critical that we listen to older people’s experiences, because they can tell us what’s working and what isn’t, as we continue to reform and improve the system.”

Despite the issues outlined in the report, Mr Gear said he remains optimistic about the future of aged care in Australia.

“We have a foundation for meaningful change. The challenge now is to make it a reality.”

While the report highlights significant concerns, Mr Gear acknowledged that the government has made encouraging amendments to address some of the issues identified.

This includes the removal of co-payments for personal care including showers, dressing and continence management support.

The government also recently announced the establishment of an escalation pathway for older people in exceptional circumstances where there are disputes about decisions made by the aged care Integrated Assessment Tool (IAT). An independent review into the IAT has also been announced.

“OPAN will continue to work closely with the government to ensure real-world experiences of older people inform the ongoing refinement of the aged care system,” Mr Gear said.

“Every older person deserves to be informed, respected and able to exercise their rights as they navigate their aged care journey.”

ABOUT THE REPORT:

The National Aged Care Advocacy Program (NACAP) Presenting Issues Report is OPAN's annual analysis of the issues older people experience when seeking or receiving government-funded aged care in Australia. The report draws on information and advocacy services delivered through NACAP by the nine network member organisations across the country.

Each year, the report identifies emerging and recurring issues affecting older people, their families and support networks, providing a unique insight into how the aged care system is

operating in practice. The findings are based on issues raised directly with aged care advocates and are supported by case examples from across Australia.

Read the full report.

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