



Basic aged care charges overturned – yet, survivors remain disadvantaged

The Federal Government’s decision to reverse its plan to charge for basic care corrects a measure that should never have been considered – access to essential personal care support services is the bare minimum requirement.

Changes to the Aged Care Act made in November 2025 undermined ageing Stolen Generations survivors’ dignity, trust, and cultural safety at a stage of life when many are already carrying lifelong disadvantages.

Since those changes, advocates, including The Healing Foundation, had warned about the impacts the new co-payment system would have on people’s lives.

The cost of essential services placed Stolen Generations survivors at serious risk of forgoing care. Evidence shows survivors experience a ‘gap within the gap’ and are much more likely to be experiencing financial hardship.

The Healing Foundation is supportive of government plans to invest \$1 billion to change the treatment of personal care services through the Support at Home program, making them free of charge alongside other clinical care.

The changes to the act late last year meant pensioners, part-pensioners or self-funded retirees paid between 5 and 50 percent of the service providers’ fee for services including showering, dressing and continence care for in-home care.

Thousands towards basic needs

According to the Support at Home fee schedule, costs could range anywhere between \$50 a week to as high as \$500 a week depending on the recipient’s package.

The Healing Foundation Chair Professor Steve Larkin said the government’s decision to amend the Act to now include basic care needs as essential services represented a step in the right direction to supporting ageing survivors.

“The reversal reduces harm, but original decisions highlight why aged-care policy must be explicitly trauma-informed and culturally safe, not just economically efficient,” he said.

“We are disappointed it has taken this long for the government to act – the wait until October for the changes to come into effect will have serious implications on the wellbeing of survivors.”

He said under the original co-payment system, survivors were likely to drop basic care like showering, because of an inability to pay, thus putting their health at risk.

“We are talking about essential hygiene. Not regularly showering for example could risk infection and health issues around bodily health. We cannot force survivors to choose between basic hygiene and other essential needs like food, solely because they can’t afford to pay for both,” he said.

“Survivors are over-represented among older Australians with poorer health, lower incomes and higher reliance on pensions due to disrupted education, employment and family life. A \$50/hour charge adversely affected them financially.”

Under the Act, survivors will still be required to pay out of pocket for services such as cooking, cleaning and laundry from 17.5 to 80 percent depending on their package.

Income and asset testing affects the percentage the recipient must pay for a service.

Discriminatory redress exemption not applied for Stolen Generations

The Healing Foundation is concerned that this will unfairly impact on survivors who have received compensation through the State and Territories Stolen Generations Redress Schemes.

Payments through these schemes were not made exempt to asset and income testing for survivors, unlike the National Redress Scheme for Institutional Child Sexual Abuse, which does not count as an asset when being means tested for aged care.

Professor Larkin said this discriminatory measure represented a major risk to survivors who need in-home assistance, further compounding affordability for essential services.

“If survivors are unable to afford these services there is a real risk they may disengage altogether from aged care services, increasing health risks and social isolation, particularly for those already wary of institutional settings and experiencing much higher levels of disadvantage than most other Australians,” he said.

“This isn’t just a cost issue, it is about dignity, autonomy and whether systems designed to support them late in life truly understand the historical harms they carry.”

The Healing Foundation has strongly advocated for the new Aged Care Act to protect the rights of Stolen Generations survivors to age with dignity, including through a submission to the Inspector-General's progress report, representations to key public servants within the Aged Care Group, and by writing to the Minister Sam Rae in August 2025.

Inspector-General of Aged Care Natalie Siegel-Brown warned the introduction of co-payments risked discriminating against those with the lowest incomes in society and would have implications to human rights, fairness and equity.

The Healing Foundation continues to call for equity measures for Stolen Generations survivors under the new Support at Home program, and the protection of Stolen Generations redress payments from aged care means testing.

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