



FACT SHEET 6

Older People and Health Care

Australia's ageing population will place increasing pressure on Commonwealth and State/Territory governments to meet the health care needs of the community. Meeting those needs will require governments and health care professionals to develop innovative service delivery models. Since 2000, there has been a focus on programs that support older people to maintain their independence in the community for as long as possible.

Hospitals

Older People's Use of Hospitals

- In 2004-05, hospitals accounted for \$29b of expenditure, or about one-third of all recurrent government expenditure on health (AIHW November 2007: 114).
- Although people aged 65 and over comprise 13.3% of the population (AIHW, 2007: 5-6), 37 per cent of overnight and longer hospital episodes were for people 65 years or over in 2004-05 (AIHW August 2007: 1).
- While the crude national rate of hospital separations is 340 per 1000 persons in 2004-05, the rate of hospital separations for people 65 years and over was 926 per 1000 persons (AIHW November 2007: 114).
- Men 65 years and over have a higher rate of hospital usage than older women (1000: 414) but because there are more women than men aged 65 and over in the population, 52% of overnight and longer hospital episodes for people aged 65 or over are for women (AIHW August 2007: 1).
- In 2004-05, patients aged 65 or over accounted for 11.4 million patient days, or 48 per cent of all patient days (AIHW November 2007: 115)

Same-day hospital separations

- In 2004-05, same-day hospital separations constituted 53 per cent of all hospital separations for people 65 years and over.
- Much of the shift to same-day services is associated with cataract treatment, endocrine treatment and nutritional and metabolic conditions (AIHW November 2007: 115).

Reasons for Admission

For Australians aged 65 years and over, the three most common reasons for admission to hospital are:

- 'Factors influencing health status and contact with health services' (a category that covers need for specific types of examination, dialysis, rehabilitative procedures, wound dressings or attention to prosthetic devices, and 'presentation of potential health hazards related to socio-economic, psychological and family circumstances'): 2,851 885 patient days, including same-day services.
- This category includes 1,337,160 rehabilitation patient days, 452,930 patient days for persons awaiting admission to residential care, and 399,385 dialysis patient days.
- Diseases of the circulatory system (including heart attack, heart failure and stroke): 1,580,402 patient days.
- Neoplasm (tumours): 1,147,160 patient days (AIHW November 2007: 117).

General Practice

- In 2004-05, people 65 years or over visit their General Practitioner 8.6 times a year on average, just over twice as often as people under 65 years on average.
- While people aged 85 and over visit the GP most often, they make up only 4 per cent of all GP visits.
- Women 65 years or over make 14.5 per cent of all visits to GPs while men 65 years and over make 10.5 per cent of all visits to GPs (AIHW November 2007: 105).

Rehabilitation and Transition Care

Rehabilitation and Maintenance Care

- Acute hospital care is administered to a lower proportion of older hospital patients than younger patients. Acute care is required by 99 per cent of all hospital patients under 65 years of age. In contrast, acute care is administered to 82 per cent of patients aged 65-74 years, to 74 per cent of patients 75-84 years, to 66 per cent of patients aged 85 and over. Older patients are often admitted to hospital for rehabilitation or 'maintenance care' (AIHW November 2007: 116).
- 'Maintenance care' is care in which the clinical intent is prevention of deterioration in the functional health of a person. Maintenance care includes care 'provided to a patient who would normally receive care in another setting, for example, at home by a relative or carer that is unavailable in the short term, or in a residential care service (AIHW November 2007: 116).
- Rehabilitation care accounted for only 1.5 per cent of all hospital separations in Australian public hospitals in 2005-06 (Productivity Commission 2008: 10.17). However, over 26 per cent of in-hospital patient days for patient aged 85 years and over in 2004-05 were classified as maintenance care or rehabilitation (AIHW November 2007: 116).

Day Therapy Centres

- Day Therapy Centres (DTCs) provide physiotherapy, occupational and speech therapy, podiatry, diversional therapy and other therapies in a community setting to older people living at home or in aged care homes, and to younger people with a disability.
- DTCs assist people to maintain or recover their independence in the community, or in low care residential services. Case management enables DTC staff to refer clients to other necessary support services.
- Day therapy is provided in a range of settings including residential aged care services, hospitals, public pools, outdoor venues such as bowling clubs and golf courses, and at older persons' clubs, or at home.
- Social work and nursing services can also be provided under the DTC program if advised by the case manager. DTC is commonly provided in conjunction with community care assistance.
- 35 per cent of participants had one or more core activity limitation (AIHW 2004; 15).
- In 2002 there were 160 DTCs funded by the Commonwealth. The program was effectively deemed a 'no growth' program and by 2008, the number of DTCs had fallen to 148 services nationally (AIHW 2004; Department of Health and Ageing).
- 'No growth' funding means that DTCs face difficulties in recruiting and retaining the allied health professionals on which the program depends (ACSA 2006).
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- Information about Day Therapy Centres can be obtained through Commonwealth Carelink Services on 1800 052 222 or via the Aged Care information Line on 1800 500 853.

Transition Care Program

- In 2004-05, 452,930 hospital bed days were accounted for by older patients awaiting admission to residential care services, with an average length of stay of 35 days (AIHW November 2007: 117).
- In 2005, the Australian and State/Territory Governments jointly fund the Transition Care Program for older people who have been in hospital. The program aims to meet the rehabilitation, recovery and care needs of people who are no longer in need of acute hospital care through the provision of 2000 TCP places.
- TCP provides rehabilitative support services to a patient either at home or in a residential facility.
- Assessment by an Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT) is required before admission to a Transition Care Program.
- A person may only enter the TCP directly upon discharge from hospital. The average duration of care is 7 weeks, with a maximum duration of 12 weeks that may in some circumstances be extended by a further 6 weeks.
- At 30 June 2007, the Australian Government had allocated 2000 places to transition care, of which 1594 were operational, amongst 62 services across all jurisdictions.
- The average length of stay in 2006-07 was 48 days nationally.
- The TCP was built on the lessons learned from two pilot programs developed through the Aged Care Innovative Pool which addressed the interface between aged care and hospital care (Productivity Commission 2008: 13.10-13.11).

Step Down Care

- Step Down Care is funded under the 'Pathways Home Program'. The program combines Commonwealth funded post hospital care with State/Territory funded rehabilitation. The aim of Step Down Care is to increase the number of frail older Australians able to return to their own homes following a stay in hospital, or if unable to return home, to enable them to enter residential care with a higher level of physical and cognitive function, mobility, and independence than would otherwise have been possible. It also aims to reduce hospital readmissions by recently discharged patients.

Pathways Home Program

- *Pathways Home* is a program funded by the Australian Government under the 2003-08 Australian Health Care Agreements. Under *Pathways Home*, a total of \$253 million was distributed over 5 years to the States and Territories to increase rehabilitation and stepdown services.

Pharmaceuticals

- Expenditure under the PBS for people of all ages totalled \$6.2b in 2005-06. Approximately half of all Government expenditure on the PBS is for pharmaceuticals used by people 65 years and over (AIHW November 2007: 111).

Dental Services

- The dental health of older Australians has improved significantly in recent years, and so has the proportion of older people attending dentists.
- 85 percent of dental care is provided by private dentists in Australia.
- Adults receiving public dental treatment have higher rates of extraction than those attending private dental care.
- Around 45 per cent of all attendances at public dental services were for emergency treatments (AIHW November 2007: 112-3).

References

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- AIHW *Bulletin 53*. August 2007 "Older Australians in Hospital".
- AIHW Day Therapy Centres Census 2002. February 2004
- Australian Productivity Commission Review of Government Services Provision, (Report on Government Services) (Canberra 2008).
- Department of Health and Ageing Caring for Someone/ Day Therapy Centres <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publicing.nsf/Content/ageing-commcare-dayther.htm> (June 2008)

ACSA June 2008. *Although Aged & Community Services Australia has made every effort to ensure accuracy of this Fact Sheet, it takes no responsibility for any errors.*