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New law ages badly

Daily Telegraph, Sydney

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Elderly pay up to 40% more for care

EXCLUSIVE
Julie Cross

Aged-care providers are charging older people up to 40 per cent more for basics – showers, cleaning, gardening and nursing – since Labor’s reforms took effect in November.

These prices are fuelling a surge in distress calls, with a major advocacy service reporting a doubling of the number of people contacting them.

The reforms, which increased the amount people must contribute to their care, also allowed providers to set their own prices without a cap.

Exclusive data reveal the scale of fee hikes for the first time with at least one provider advertising \$180 an hour for a shower, before the automatic 10 per cent service fee. At the top of the list, a gardener costs \$290 an hour, a cleaner \$170, and a registered nurse \$320, according to figures compiled by CaringCo, which helps people find providers.

The average price, which

gives a better idea of what people are paying, shows that an hour of personal care that includes things like help with showers, costs the most in South Australia at \$112.84.

Victoria had the biggest increase, up by 39 per cent, from \$77.09 to \$107.31 an hour.

The average cost of a gardener is \$117.97 an hour in Queensland, the highest in the country, while registered nurses are most expensive in NSW at \$181.80 an hour.

Nick Smith, of CaringCo, compared 50,000 service prices before and after November 1. He said the recent increases varied significantly and some on the higher side were “shocking”.

“We hope that the price increases genuinely reflect real delivery costs and a sustainable, compliant workforce rather than simply padding margins,” Mr Smith said.

Polio and stroke survivor Robyn Abrahams, 75, of Melbourne, said many people like her had not received statements from their aged-care providers since October due to system issues and worried they could face big bills.

“I could get to March and owe a lot of money,” said Ms Abrahams, who was recently appointed to the Aged Care Council of Elders.

She said it was like operating “blindfolded”.

She says others have had statements, done the sums and “dropped out” of the scheme because they can’t afford it.

Meanwhile, calls to the Older Persons Advocacy Network have jumped by 96 per cent since the new Aged Care Act came into force.

Many complaints are about the price increases, which have resulted in people reduc-

ing or cancelling services to manage costs or requesting financial hardship assistance.

OPAN chief Craig Gear said under the new Aged Care Act it was clear that many older people were “worse off”.

Other key issues include long wait times for assessments to get into the system and problems with the Integrated Assessment Tool algorithmic decision-making not reflecting the needs of older people. Those who do get approved are finding it hard to find a provider.

In residential aged care, most complaints are about communication, quality of care and fees and charges. Reports suggest some providers are charging for services previously offered at no extra cost.



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Robyn Abrahams, 75, has not received a statement from her aged care provider since October.
Picture: Wayne Taylor.