

AUSTRALIAN Ageing Agenda

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Status a factor in residential aged care wait



Stories added to your shortlist:

Educated seniors with a degree are often prioritised in the wait for residential aged care, according to a study, but there is hope that tweaks to the process will make it fairer.

Waiting Times in Aged Care: What Matters? also found that those living in isolated, rural areas have a longer wait for residential aged care places.

The survey was part of the huge, government-funded Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health, which began in 1996 and has assessed 57,000 individuals.

It found assessed needs – including health status, whether the person lived alone and their age – were the driving factors in wait times for both residential and home aged care.

Conversely, the study found there was no evidence that socioeconomic status was associated with waiting times for home aged care.

Study lead author Serena Yu said she was not surprised there was bias towards more educated seniors in the wait for residential care.

“We found that people who had a degree or higher were accessing residential care a bit faster. We thought there would be some socioeconomic gradient, so these results do make sense, but it's not a great thing,” Ms Yu told *Australian Ageing Agenda*.

There are a few explanations for the trend, but they can't be proved with the data collected, said Ms Yu, a senior research fellow at the Centre for Health Economics Research and Evaluation at University of Technology Sydney.

First, educated seniors may have an easier time navigating the My Aged Care portal, which is often described as complicated and difficult to navigate.

Second, a higher education level may equate to greater financial resource

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The longer wait times in isolated regional or rural areas are easier to explain, said Ms Yu.

“In those places, there are fewer facilities, and it’s tougher to access staff with the necessary skills to care for the elderly – especially those with complex needs.”

Although the study only looked at women, Ms Yu said she believes the results would have been similar for men. However because women have a longer life expectancy, they are often older when they access residential aged care, by which time they are more likely to have dementia.

There are plans to simplify My Aged Care, as well as proposed changes in the assessment process for residential aged care, said Ms Yu.

A trial of a national network of outreach centres, information hubs and advisors is underway to help vulnerable seniors navigate the aged care system and access services.

Most support services will be delivered face-to-face but there will also telephone and online options ([read more here < https://australianageingagenda.com.au/2019/02/25/aged-care-navigator-trials-begin/>](https://australianageingagenda.com.au/2019/02/25/aged-care-navigator-trials-begin/)).

It is hoped that face-to-face assessment will be easier for both staff trying to understand the client’s needs, and seniors trying to get access to a service, Ms Yu said.

There is also a lot of concern about the prices providers can charge and the contracts that people are agreeing to, which definitely has a socioeconomic element to it, she said.

“If socioeconomic status has a role to play, it’s something that we need to address.”

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