

MEDIA RELEASE – August 21, 2026 - For immediate release

Government move on aged care assessments welcome - but human judgement must remain at the heart of the system

COTA Tasmania has welcomed the Federal Government's acknowledgement that greater human oversight is needed when its automated Support at Home assessment system produces an inappropriate result.

The Government has announced it will pursue legislation to establish an escalation pathway for cases where the Integrated Assessment Tool does not properly reflect an older person's needs.

COTA Tasmania CEO Brigid Wilkinson said the announcement was an important step, particularly following serious concerns exposed by ABC Four Corners this week.

"Recognition that an automated assessment can sometimes produce the wrong outcome - and that there must be a way for a human decision-maker to intervene - is welcome," Ms Wilkinson said.

"But the detail will be critical.

"An experienced assessor who has met an older person, understands their circumstances and can see that the system has produced an inappropriate result should have a meaningful and timely way of having that outcome reconsidered.

"That safeguard should be part of good decision-making, not an exceptional remedy available only after something has gone wrong."

The Four Corners investigation raised serious questions about how the classification system works, how much of the information gathered during an assessment influences the eventual classification, how the algorithm was tested and validated, and what happens when its result does not reflect the needs of the individual.

COTA Tasmania believes technology can assist good decision-making, but it must never replace professional judgement or accountability.

"An assessment of an older person is not simply a data collection exercise," Ms Wilkinson said.

"It is an opportunity for a trained professional to understand how someone is actually managing - their health, mobility, cognition, home environment, informal supports and the things that may place their independence at risk.

"Governments should have learned from the experience of Robodebt that automated systems must never be allowed to displace transparent, accountable human decision-making.

"The circumstances are very different, but the fundamental lesson is relevant: when government decisions have significant consequences for people's lives, there must be meaningful human oversight and a clear avenue to correct mistakes."

COTA Tasmania supports consistency in aged care assessment. However, consistency should not come at the expense of good judgement, commonsense, or the expertise of the professionals actually assessing older Australians.

The Government's proposed escalation pathway is therefore welcome, but COTA Tasmania believes several questions remain to be answered.

We would like to see:

- a clear explanation of who can initiate an escalation and in what circumstances;
- assessors able to flag an outcome they believe does not properly reflect the needs of the person they have assessed;
- clinical expertise central to decisions about whether a classification should be changed;
- greater transparency about how the classification algorithm operates, the factors influencing its decisions and the evidence used to validate it;
- independent clinical and consumer scrutiny of the classification system, including meaningful involvement of older people, carers and experienced aged care assessors;
- a simple, accessible and timely review process which does not place the burden on an older person to prove that an assessment is wrong; and
- regular review of whether each funding classification actually purchases the level and type of care it is intended to provide.

Ms Wilkinson said the proposed safeguard should also be monitored closely once implemented.

"It will not be enough simply to create an escalation mechanism. We need to know whether assessors can use it readily, how often it is used, how quickly decisions are made and whether it is actually correcting inappropriate classifications.

"Older people should not have to become expert navigators of the aged care bureaucracy simply to receive the support they need."

These issues have particular implications in Tasmania, where older people living in rural and regional communities already face additional challenges accessing services. A nominal level of funding is of little value if it cannot purchase the care a person needs, when and where they need it.

The objective of Support at Home is to enable older Australians to remain independent and live safely in their own homes for as long as possible.

"Algorithms can be useful tools," Ms Wilkinson said.

"But they should inform decisions - not have the final word on a person's care."

ENDS

Media Contact

Brigid Wilkinson, COTA CEO

Mobile: 0437 031 173 ; Email:brigidw@cotatas.org.au