

Supporting independent living

From hearing and vision checks to home modifications, government-funded support services are helping older Australians maintain their health and independence

WORDS Beth Wallace



Data from the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute reveals up to 81 per cent of Australians aged over 55 want to live independently for as long as possible.

To support this trend, a number of federal and state-funded programs have been established to ensure people can age in place safely and comfortably.

According to Rebecca Nairne, Specialist Aged Care Manager at Australian Unity, government-

subsidised services such as health checks and home modifications support people choosing to stay in their own house – or with a family member.

“They keep people safe, maintain independence and reduce the risk of presentation to hospital or early entry to residential aged care,” she says.

Safeguarding your health

While each state and territory coordinates its own health programs, they all encompass vision, hearing, dental and continence services, as well as subsidised aids and equipment.

Image: istockphoto.com

“The best place to start is the My Aged Care website, which has a comprehensive list of all the different services and providers in your area,” Rebecca says.

Alternatively, Australian Unity customers already assigned to a Home Care Package or the Commonwealth Home Support Programme can contact their Service Coordinator for a referral to relevant services, most of which have simple eligibility criteria, as Charles Lie, Australian Unity’s General Manager Service Operations – Home Care Services, explains.

“It’s basically just an assessment that says you have an unmet need,” he says.

If eligible, you’ll receive an initial health check and then, if required, ongoing support and equipment.

“Hearing aids, optical products – in many instances, items such as these could be covered with customer funding, or via referrals to other federal and state programs where funding is available,” Charles says. “Australian Unity can help with arranging this.”

Adapting your home to meet your goals and needs

Customers may be entitled to receive funding for major home modifications through a government-funded service. The first step is to undertake an allied health assessment.

“The assessor will call out any safety or physical considerations around the home,” Charles says. “For example, if the customer has mobility issues and a wheelchair is suggested, then they might consider getting a ramp to replace stairs at entry ways.”

Other modifications that might be available, where clinically justified, include replacing baths with showers, lowering or raising kitchen benches, widening doorways to accommodate wheelchairs and walking frames, or installing lifts.

“A clinical assessment will consider the customer’s care needs, and will make recommendations to support their independence and safety,” Rebecca says.

Future-proofing your home

Australian Unity customers with a Home Care Package may choose to allocate funding to minor home modifications.

Making simple changes in and around the home can help people maintain normal routines safely and confidently, as Charles Lie, Australian Unity’s General Manager Service Operations – Home Care Services, explains.

“It might be installing grab rails, replacing taps that are difficult to turn on and off, removing trip hazards, or clearing gutters and roof debris,” he says. “Emergency alarms are also common, covering safety and assistive tools, such as alarm buzzers and fall monitors, and smoke alarms.”

Minor upgrades such as these don’t typically require a formal assessment. “We’ve got plenty of partners that do these kinds of projects for our customers every day,” Charles says. “As long as the customer is eligible and the funding is available, we can refer it out.”

Australian Unity Care Workers and Service Coordinators can assist customers in identifying areas around the home where simple changes could make a big difference to their quality of life.

If funding is approved and there is a clinical recommendation, Australian Unity can engage third-party contractors to undertake the agreed-upon modifications. Costs may be entirely covered if enough funds are available in your Home Care Package. Alternatively, if you do not have a Home Care Package but have been assessed as eligible through the Commonwealth Home Support »



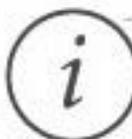
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CHARLES LIE,
GENERAL MANAGER SERVICE
OPERATIONS - HOME
CARE SERVICES

Programme, modifications can be undertaken where funding is available and where clinically recommended. Any customer costs will depend on the type of modification to occur and the amount of funding available to the customer.

Certain states and territories also subsidise the cost of equipment and appliances. Oxygen supplements, for example, are available to people with a medical need for continual oxygen therapy. And in New South Wales, the Appliance Replacement Offer run by Energy NSW gives eligible residents a discount when they upgrade their old television or fridge to a new energy-efficient model.

To find programs relevant to your needs, Charles suggests calling your Service Coordinator for advice. “Australian Unity can take care of everything,” he says. “And if you’re not eligible for a certain service but should be, we may be able to arrange a referral for different subsidised funding.”



For more information about government-funded programs, visit myagedcare.gov.au or contact your Australian Unity Service Coordinator.

Cleaning up

Until recently, showering was a challenge for 90-year-old Brian Schrape. Stepping into his bath to access the overhead shower had become difficult for the former boxer, who has dementia and can be unsteady on his feet. His occupational therapist recommended replacing the bath with an open shower space and installing grab rails throughout the room.

Australian Unity helped to arrange the renovations – first determining Brian’s eligibility through his Home Care Package, which covered around half the costs, and then finding a builder.

“It’s made a huge difference,” Brian’s wife Hui explains. “Now he sits down in the shower and I can wash him from top to toe.”