

Aged Care Services – “I have a concern!”

CLARE AND BARRY’S STORY

Clare and Barry had been new to needing support to remain independent in their home. It was Clare who had had a fall and broken her hip. This meant quite a long period of rehabilitation – and with no family available to help, this changed the dynamics of the household considerably. Barry was struggling with his diabetes and had recently decided it was best not to drive.

Barry had a level 2 Home Care package. Everything had started out well, and the provider had been very responsive. However, over time the service was declining: staff changed and communication with the case manager was proving very difficult. Now with Clare unable to help, the situation was becoming impossible – they needed more help, not less.

Clare and Barry looked at the agreement they had made with their provider. It said that they should try to sort any problems out directly, and if that didn’t work, they should go to what was known as the ‘advocacy service’.

Clare and Barry were not complainers – in fact, they had never really made a complaint before. However, after leaving several phone messages with his provider, Barry was fed up, and contacted the advocacy service in his state. When they also failed to respond over the next fortnight, Barry decided to contact the Aged Care Complaints Commissioner. The Commissioner’s office was very helpful. They noted down Barry’s concerns and assured him that they would try to get an early resolution.

Barry and Clare’s situation isn’t all that common. Complaints to the Aged Care Complaints Commissioner are increasing, but even so, only a very small percentage people receiving aged care services make a complaint.

Many people don’t complain because they are happy with the services they receive. Others, however, don’t know that help is available, or feel that they shouldn’t complain. Making a complaint can take some energy, so sometimes people prefer to live in hope that things will get better.

Barry and Clare took the step of complaining because they needed all the help that they could get at a difficult time and they were getting frustrated with the situation.

Knowing your rights and responsibilities

Before making a complaint, it’s good to be clear on your and your provider’s rights and responsibilities. Everyone who receives aged care services is given a document on rights and responsibilities, which clarifies what to expect. For example, everyone with a Home Care Package has the right to:

- reliable, coordinated, safe, quality care and services
- receive a written plan of care within two weeks of starting the Package
- participate in making decisions that affect them.

In Clare and Barry's case, the provider was not meeting their responsibilities. Clare and Barry had tried to sort things out themselves, but with little success.

What to do if you have a concern about the care you are receiving?

- Read the charter of rights and responsibilities and your agreement with the aged care provider
- Discuss your concern with the provider of your aged care services
- If you are not comfortable to discuss your complaints with the provider of your service or the complaint has not been resolved to your satisfaction, you can contact your state aged care advocacy organisation to discuss your concerns. They are a free, confidential and independent service. They can provide you with advice and support.
The National Aged Care Advocacy Line is 1800 700 600
- If you still have concern or the issue has not been addressed your next step is to contact **the Aged Care Complaints Commissioner 1800 550 552**

The next step for Clare and Barry was to get outside assistance by making a complaint. The Aged Care Complaints Commissioner is a free, independent dispute resolution service for anyone with a complaint about government-funded aged care services. The Commissioner chooses a relevant, practical and efficient approach to resolve your complaint, according to your specific concerns and circumstances. Speaking recently with COTA Australia, the Commissioner, Rae Lamb, said that her vision was that 'people can trust that making a complaint is worthwhile; that it will lead to resolution for the individual and improve care for others.'

How to make a complaint

If you've tried to resolve concerns with your provider and with the National Aged Care Advocacy Service, but haven't had a satisfying result, contact the Aged Care Complaints Commissioner's office on **1800 550 552**. Calls are free from fixed lines but calls from mobiles may be charged. Complaints can be anonymous.

More information

The Commissioner's booklet ["I have a concern"](#) explains the complaint process in detail. It's available in many community languages and can be ordered online or over the phone for free.