

# Cross-party letter of rage

**EXCLUSIVE**  
**Julie Cross**

More than 100 federal politicians have formed an unprecedented alliance to fight Labor's 'shambolic' aged care reforms, which have left seniors "much worse off".

Under the "Support at Home" system introduced by the government on November 1, many older Australians have been forced to slash basic services, with some having to choose between a hot meal and a daily shower.

So enraged by the changes – and the dire impact they are having on their constituents – the group of politicians from Liberal, National, One Nation and Greens parties, as well as independents, have sent a

two-page letter to Aged Care and Seniors Minister Sam Rae, demanding urgent action.

They warn of an "expanding body of evidence" showing a significant proportion of older people are "much worse off" under the new regime.

"In particular, we are greatly concerned about reports that older Australians are increasingly unable to afford assistance with showering and with preparing meals," they write.

The massive scale of the revolt, which comes a day after this masthead launched a campaign called Care Repair calling for a fairer go for struggling seniors, is underscored by its signatories including shadow aged care minis-

"... older Australians are indeed much worse off."  
 "... we are greatly concerned about reports that older Australians are increasingly unable to afford assistance with showering and with preparing meals."  
 "There is ... growing concern about the efficacy of the Integrated Assessment Tool."  
 "... support to keep older Australians living independently at home for longer provides a far greater quality of life."  
 — Joint letter to Minister Sam Rae

ter Anne Ruston and Greens spokeswoman Penny Allman-Payne, who signed on behalf of their entire respective parties.

They are joined by high-profile crossbenchers including David Pocock, Jacqui Lambie, and

Rebekha Sharkie, as well as One Nation's Barnaby Joyce. The alliance wants to move personal care, which includes showers, into the "clinical" category, rather than "independence", meaning older people would not have to contribute towards the cost.

The politicians also want the Minister to consider whether essential daily activities, like meals, have been appropriately categorised.

The letter implores the government to reverse a ban on humans being able to overrule the assessment tool's results, which have resulted in people having funding applications rejected.

Advocates fear the algorithm is "robotised 2.0". "It's disgusting that Anthony Albanese is giving a robot control over what care, if any, older Australians deserve," Ms Ruston said.

The signatories also ask the government to clarify when service price caps will be introduced. Senator Pocock said making services like shower-

ing more affordable would prevent falls and infections. "Our hospitals cannot take the strain of a broken aged care system," he said.

Senator Allman-Payne said: "It would be tempting to describe Labor's new aged care system as a shambles, but the bleak truth is that this is all by design."

Mr Rae is also facing pressure from a supergroup of 40 aged care organisations, including Meals on Wheels Australia and Dementia Australia over the aged care reforms.

Sam Rae did not comment directly on the letter.

**READ THE FULL LETTER**  
[bea.aidson.com.au](http://bea.aidson.com.au)

Jayne Christian, 39, and her mother Julie-Ann Christian, 68, from Wagga Wagga. Picture: Rohan Kelly



## Faceless, heartless call

**Julie Cross**

Former lawyer Jayne Christian can see her mother's health deteriorating before her eyes, yet according to the government's controversial robo-algorithm, she's doing just fine.

Julie-Ann, 68, has motor neurone disease, which is stripping her of the ability to do anything for herself. She requires a wheelchair to get around, and cannot shower independently or prepare meals.

She would be in an aged-care facility or hospital, if it wasn't for her daughter Jayne, 39, giving up her job and home in Maitland, NSW, three years ago and moving into her mum's Wagga Wagga property.

Following a decline in Julie-Ann's health last year, Jayne applied for her mum to be reassessed in the hope of getting more funding.

She was shocked when her mum received a letter which stated, "The My Aged Care system algorithm has determined there has been no change." Jayne said the result was

ridiculous and asked the staff to do something about it, but they claimed "they could not override the algorithm's determination, they could only input the information into the system".

She said frontline staff were forced to defend "faceless" decisions even they don't agree with. "The system shields the decision-makers from any responsibility," Jayne said.

After Jayne forced a review, her mum was approved for the upgrade, but not on the basis of her health needs.

"On the revised decision they took away the algorithm reasoning and then they've just stuck in there 'because you're an Aboriginal woman'... it just feels slack... there's legitimate medical reasons as to why she should receive more care," she said. "I want that recognised."

Jayne, who is juggling her own IVF journey at the same time as caring for her mum, said even with the upgrade, the budget barely covers what is needed. She said keeping people in their own homes was cheaper for the government.

## Fears system won't be there

**EXCLUSIVE**  
**Julie Cross**

Nine in 10 Australians are worried about the cost of aged care, a survey reveals.

The poll, conducted by News Corp's Growth Intelligence Centre, confirmed that people thought aged care was unaffordable, with more than 90 per cent of the 924 respon-

dents worried about the cost. About 30 per cent of those in the aged care system said they had not cut services since the November 1 changes but, of those who had, almost half slashed domestic help (47 per cent), followed by social support (29 per cent) and meal preparation (28 per cent).

And, while Australians overwhelmingly wanted to

age in their home, fewer than one in five Australians trusted the aged care system to support them or their families when it mattered most.

Boomers were most likely to feel that way (48 per cent), followed by Gen X (39 per cent) and Millennials (37 per cent). Among improvements people wanted to see were help for older people to stay in

their homes (63 per cent), shorter waiting times (60 per cent) and lower out-of-pocket costs (57 per cent), with around half also calling for increased government funding and stronger oversight and accountability of providers.

Overall, just under 40 per cent of people believed they were worse off since the reforms came into play, while 24

per cent said they were better off. "With the Middle East conflict likely to hit those relying on government services harder than most, older Australians are getting financially whacked on multiple fronts," News Corp research head James Taylor said. "Fewer than one in five Australians trust the system to actually be there when they need it."

## Still haunted by the 'dirty smirk' on an elite school's doctor

As the daughter of the junior headmaster at one of Australia's most prestigious schools, Joanna Mary was exposed to a world where sexual predators operated with impunity – some were staff members, some were students and some were even family friends.

In 1981, Ms Mary – not her real last name – visited Geelong Grammar's resident doctor, Dr David Mackey, when

she was just 15. What happened next would haunt her for years. She was there for him to look at a cyst, but instead, he asked her to take her clothes off and started to stimulate her clitoris.

"This continued for at least a minute with a dirty smirk on his face. He smiled because he definitely knew what he was doing to me," she writes in The Junior Headmaster's Daughter, which has just been

published on Amazon Kindle.

"I stared at the high window behind him and went into survival mode until he was finished. I don't remember what was even discussed regarding my cyst. I just had to escape.

"I felt so ashamed. I certainly would never tell my parents because I might have gotten into trouble for even talking about it."

In her book, Ms Mary details how abusers were able to

survive – and thrive – in such a prestigious institution.

She describes how complaints from children were dismissed. "Because we were children, if we said anything, it was always fobbed off. Hormones were always blamed. Or we were silly little teenage girls."

According to Ms Mary, Dr Mackey had the trust of the school staff, meaning no chaperone was required for

appointments. This gave him unfettered access to vulnerable students.

Geelong Grammar School featured heavily in the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, with five staff members convicted of child sex offences.

Ms Mary has written the book to "hopefully help other people navigate their way through similar experiences".



Joanna Mary



Health > Wellbeing > Ageing

**EXCLUSIVE**

# Over 100 MPs demand urgent action on aged care reforms harming seniors

Seniors are being forced to choose between meals and showers as more than 100 federal politicians unite across party lines to demand urgent fixes to a system they say is leaving older Australians worse off.



**Julie Cross**

Social Affairs Editor

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Under the "Support at Home" system introduced by the government on November 1, many older Australians have been forced to slash basic services, with some having to choose between a hot meal and a daily shower.

So enraged by the changes - and the dire impact they are having on their constituents - the group of politicians from Liberal, National, One Nation and Greens parties, as well as independents, have sent a two-page letter to Minister for Ageing and Seniors Sam Rae, demanding urgent action.



They warn of an “expanding body of evidence” showing that a significant proportion of older people are “much worse off” under the new regime.

“In particular, we are greatly concerned about reports that older Australians are increasingly unable to afford assistance with showering and with preparing meals,” they write.

“ We are writing to you regarding an avalanche of concerns being raised with our offices about the Support at Home program.”

“ ... there is an expanding body of evidence that a significant proportion of older Australians are indeed much worse off after transitioning to the new Support at Home system.”







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The massive scale of the political revolt, which comes a day after this [masthead launched a campaign called Care Repair](#) calling for a fairer go for struggling seniors, is underscored by its signatories including Shadow Aged Care Minister Anne Ruston and Greens spokesperson Penny Allman-Payne, who signed on behalf of their entire respective parties.

“There is also a growing concern about the efficacy of the Integrated Assessment Tool. We are hearing increasing reports from older Australians with high needs, including those living with MND and dementia, being reassessed at lower levels of funding despite health professionals determining that their conditions have deteriorated.”





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“ Early intervention and support to keep older Australians living independently at home for longer provides a far greater quality of life that we believe we all deserve in our later years.”

They are joined by high-profile crossbenchers including David Pocock, Jacqui Lambie, and Rebekha Sharkie, as well as Nationals defectee MP Barnaby Joyce, now with One Nation.

The alliance wants to move personal care which includes showers, into the ‘clinical’ category, rather than ‘independence’, meaning older people will not have to contribute towards the cost.

# CARE REPAIR

Older Australians are being failed by a flawed aged care system, with care unaffordable for many.

**We want to change that.**

[Follow the campaign >](#)



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The politicians also want the Minister to consider whether essential daily activities, like meals, have been appropriately categorised.

The letter also implores the government to reverse a ban on humans being able to overrule the assessment tool's results, after that power was removed on November 1, resulting people having funding applications rejected, or downgraded.



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Advocates and aged care providers fear the algorithm is the new ‘robodebt 2.0’.

Senators Ruston, Allman-Payne and Pocock have been calling for the government to come clean on who designed the algorithm and to make any trials public.

“It’s disgusting that Anthony Albanese is giving a robot control over what care, if any, older Australians deserve to help them stay in their own homes,” Ms Ruston said.

The letter states that the signatories are “hearing increasing reports from older Australians with high needs, including those living with MND and dementia, being reassessed at lower levels of funding despite health professionals determining that their conditions have deteriorated.”

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“When parliamentarians from across the political spectrum unite on an issue, it speaks volumes. This is a damning indictment of the Government’s failed Support at Home rollout and the real harm it is causing vulnerable older Australians,” Ms Ruston said.



Senator Penny Allman-Payne at Parliament House in Canberra.  
Picture: NewsWire / Martin Ollman

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The signatories also want confirmation around when the government will introduce price caps on services, which could help lower prices, and to review the impact of the current 10 per cent case management fee cap, blamed for significantly driving up service prices.

Sen Pocock said services like showering is a basic dignity, and making it more affordable prevents falls and infections, which cost the taxpayer more in the long run.

“Our hospitals cannot take the strain of a broken aged care system, and we all pay the price if we don’t provide the older Australians with affordable support to age at home,” he said.

Senator Allman-Payne said “It would be tempting to describe Labor’s new aged care system as a shambles, but the bleak truth is that this is all by design.”

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Minister Rae is also facing pressure from a supergroup of 40 aged care organisations, including Meals on Wheels Australia, Dementia Australia and the Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN), over the aged care reforms.



Minister for Aged Care and Seniors Sam Rae during a media conference, Calamvale. Picture: NewsWire / Liam Kidston

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CHSP (Commonwealth Home Support Program) Alliance co-convener Paul Sadler said the implantation of the new Support at Home program has been “hugely problematic”, with people being denied services they need.

OPAN chief executive Craig Gear said he had seen crazy prices of \$350 per hour for an Aboriginal health worker on a weekday and \$762 after hours.

Minister for Aged Care and Seniors Sam Rae did not comment directly on the letter.

“The new system provides a more equitable, accurate and fair approach so as many older Australians as possible can access the care they need,” he said.



Jayne Christian, 39, and her mother Julie-Ann Christian, 68, from Wagga Wagga, pictured at Parramatta Square, say they assessment process is “slack”. Picture: Rohan Kelly

## ‘It just feels slack’

Former lawyer Jayne Christian can see her mother’s health deteriorating before her eyes, yet according to the government’s controversial robo-algorithm, she’s doing just fine.





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Julie-Ann, 68, has Motor Neurone Disease, which is stripping her of the ability to do anything for herself. She requires a wheelchair to get around, is unable to shower independently or prepare meals.

She would be in an aged care facility or hospital, if it wasn't for her daughter Jayne, 39, giving up her job and home in Maitland, NSW, three years ago and moving into her mum's Wagga Wagga property.



Following a decline in Julie-Ann's health last year, Jayne applied for her mum to be reassessed in the hope of getting more funding.

She was shocked when her mum received a letter which stated, "The My Aged Care system algorithm has used information provided for your assessment and determined there has been no change ..."



Julie-Ann Christian, 68, from Wagga Wagga, NSW, during recent hospital stay. SUPPLIED



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Jayne said the result was ridiculous and asked the staff to do something about it, who claimed “they could not override the algorithm’s determination, they could only input the information into the system”.

She said frontline staff are forced to defend “faceless” decisions they don’t even agree with.

“The system shields the decision-makers from any responsibility,” Jayne said.

After Jayne forced a review, her mum was approved for the upgrade, but not on the basis of her health needs.

“On the revised decision they took away the algorithm reasoning and then they’ve just stuck in there ‘because you’re an Aboriginal woman’ ... it just feels slack ... there’s legitimate medical reasons as to why she should receive more care,” she said. “I want that recognised.”



She said keeping people in their own homes is cheaper for the Government, than putting them in aged care homes.

“If a family says they aren’t coping, the system shouldn’t simply look at the data and conclude nothing has changed,” Jayne said.



# 'The elderly are getting beaten down': Aged care reforms leave vulnerable facing huge costs

With care packages slashed and fees soaring, Australians are stepping in to care for loved ones now facing a shocking reality under the new reforms.



Julie Cross

X @juliejournos

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**PREMIUM**

### Robodebt 2.0? Why Aged Care reforms are under fire

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Exclusive: Michael Stanley looks forward to his





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Exclusive: Michael Stanley looks forward to his one and only shower of the week.

It's now a luxury, as it is for many older Australians, following the government's aged care reforms, which saw a huge spike in the cost of services.

In Michael's case hiring a carer doubled overnight, from \$68 an hour to \$135.



The 80-year-old, who is utterly dependent on others after suffering strokes impacting both sides of his body, needs help getting in and out of bed and to the toilet, and requires someone to watch him as he eats in case he chokes.



Michael Stanley and his wife April Stanley-Banks, who says her workload caring for her husband is unsustainable.

Before the November 1 reforms, he was receiving 46 hours of care a month. Now his aged care package can only stretch to 19. His provider makes the same money as before.





In order to keep his precious shower, he had to cut his monthly trip with a support worker into town. He would use that 6.5-hour visit to complete a list of jobs, which gave him the chance to talk to people in the community.

Now he spends most of his time within the four walls of his Kangaroo Island home, with his wife April Stanley-Banks, 65, a former emergency and acute care nurse, who was already doing the majority of care for her husband prior to the changes and now says her workload is “unsustainable”.







April Stanley-Banks says older Australians deserve better.



Michael Stanley spends most of his time within the four walls of his home.

She said her husband, a former farmer and stock inspector, is resilient. He slept for many years in a swag while he was out maintaining fences,





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She said her husband, a former farmer and stock inspector, is resilient. He slept for many years in a swag while he was out maintaining fences, tending stock, and battling the weather, debt and attrition.

While he remains stoic, his wife said he and other older Australians who have worked hard and paid their taxes all their lives deserve better.



“This is a national crisis,” April said. “Everyone is falling through the cracks.”

“The system is a boxing ring and the elderly are getting beaten down.”



Philip Hodges, 71, a Forgotten Australian, has had to cut back to one shower a week due to the new aged care reforms. He has also had issues accessing a suitable wheelchair and is essentially stuck at...

Philip Hodges, 71, is a Forgotten Australian – a term used for those who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children and were often abused, neglected and suffered loss of identity.

His early life wasn't easy and nor are his twilight years.







As a result of the reforms he has reduced his showers from three a week to one.

Meanwhile, the former disability worker is without a wheelchair after a bureaucratic mix-up.

As a result he is “trapped at home in a reclining chair” for most of the day.

“I can probably go from my front door to the front gate,” Philip, from Melbourne, said. “Then I need to sit down.”

He wishes the government would start “listening to us”.

Brisbane’s Sarah Bromley, 93, is “just a little old lady who has never been in trouble for anything, not even a parking ticket”.

But after November 1 she found herself in a terrible predicament – either pay \$5000 a month to keep the same level of care, or start cutting services.



Sarah Bromley, 93, of Brisbane, was hit with a monthly bill of almost \$5000 after blatant price gouging by her provider saw costs of her services exceed her aged care package.

Her daughter Kate, 75, worked out her mum would need to pay in excess of \$55,000 a year to keep her current level of service. She receives an annual pension of \$35,000.

They had no choice but to drastically slash her care.





It means Sarah, who has dementia, is now a lot more unsafe in her own home.

As well as largely having to fend for herself at weekends, she has had to reduce how many times a week a carer comes in to remind her to take her medication in the morning.

The same for her meal prompts, which also provided her with some social company during lunch. Wound care and cleaning has also been reduced, and shopping services stopped entirely. Her daughter Kate is taking on more care. "I live and breathe mum," she said.

Kate said the blatant price gouging by her mum's provider is outrageous.

Fees for a Registered Nurse (RN) rose to \$308 per hour, while medication prompts could no longer be billed in 15-minute blocks, only 30-minute blocks.







Kate said navigating the reforms has been overwhelming.

“Some days were so bad, I can honestly say, if there’d been a bus going past the front door of this house, I would have jumped in front of it,” she said.

Christina Tsobanis, from Melbourne, said she loves being her mum’s full-time carer, as well as a carer for her aunt, but it is getting tougher.



Christina Tsobanis and her mum, Sophie Tsobanis. Picture: David Caird



Her mum Sophie, 85, has dementia and has seen her care dwindle from around 26 hours a week to 14. After November 1 she cut back one of her showers a week, as well as her podiatrist.

Christina is picking up the slack. There's no professional care on weekends or public holidays, because just one shift would eat through half her weekly budget. Now red tape means she can't get the best deals on items like continence pads like she used to pre the reforms.

“What I begrudge is the fact that the funding is basically being rerouted to the provider's pockets as opposed to providing some flexibility of choice around how we can cost effectively manage the services that we need for mum to live independently and safely every day.”





Gill Lewis with husband Tony, who tragically died after falling in the bathroom. Picture: Lachie Millard.

Gill Lewis blames the aged care system for her husband Tony's death in January.

The 71-year-old, who had Motor Neurone Disease, had already decided he would choose Voluntary Assisted Dying when his wife could no longer cope because he didn't want to move into an aged care facility. Despite their desperate pleas for more help with showers and personal care, he died after a fall in the bathroom.

Gill said her husband never got the appropriate help to stay safe in his home because the system worked at a "glacial pace", which could never keep up with his needs.

The Bribie Island resident said aged care turned from a "fiasco into a circus" after November 1 and that the Government needs to take action.

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The Bribie Island resident said aged care turned from a "fiasco into a circus" after November 1 and that the Government needs to take action.

"I don't know whether it's grief, or resentment ... I think it's anger that's driving this at the moment, trying to get some change," Gill said.

"My question is why are we treating people like this?"