
Position Statement

Supporting Older Australians – Hospital in the Home

3 February 2025

Hospital in the Home (HITH) is a healthcare model that allows patients to receive hospital-level acute care in the comfort of their own home or other suitable environment. Under this program, patients remain classified as inpatients and receive medical treatment, nursing care, and allied health services at home under the supervision of their hospital doctor, provided it is safe and appropriate for their condition.^{1,2,3,4}

HITH programs represent a transformative approach to delivering healthcare that aligns with the evolving needs and preferences of older Australians. Supporting older Australians through HITH not only offers a viable alternative to traditional hospital settings but also enhances the quality of care and life for this demographic.^{5,6}

This position statement advocates for the widespread implementation and support of HITH programs to enhance the quality of life and healthcare outcomes for older Australians.

Benefits of HITH for older Australians

HITH programs, which provide hospital-level care to patients in their homes, offer numerous benefits. The benefits for older Australians include:

1. **Enhanced quality of life:** HITH allows older Australians to receive medical care in the comfort of their homes, which can significantly improve their overall quality of life.
2. **Supportive environment:** Home-based care enables older people to receive care in a familiar and supportive environment, reduces the risk of hospital-acquired infections, and avoids the stress associated with hospital stays.
3. **Reduced hospital readmissions:** Evidence shows that HITH programs can reduce hospital readmissions by providing continuous care and monitoring in a home setting. This approach ensures that older patients receive timely interventions and follow-up care, which contributes to better health outcomes.
4. **Cost-effectiveness:** HITH is often more cost-effective than traditional hospital care. By reducing the need for inpatient beds and utilising home-based resources, healthcare systems can optimise their expenditure while delivering high-quality care.

5. Personalised care: HITH programs enable tailored care plans that address the specific needs of older patients. This personalised approach facilitates better management of chronic conditions, more effective rehabilitation, and improved patient satisfaction.^{5,6,7,8,9}

However, there can be challenges involved in implementing such programs, including resource shortages, regulatory inconsistencies, technological demands, clinical challenges (including strict patient selection criteria), and poor collaboration among providers like GPs, specialists, and HITH staff. These challenges must be addressed to fully achieve the known benefits of HITH.

Ageing Australia's position

Ageing Australia supports the expansion of HITH programs, as they have the potential to enhance older Australians' quality of life, reduce hospital readmissions, and reduce healthcare costs. By addressing the potential implementation challenges through strategic policy, technological, and educational improvements, particularly through the National Healthcare Reform Agreement, Australia can optimise its healthcare system to better serve its ageing population.

Recommendations

HITH should be actively supported and expanded as a valuable component of modern healthcare to support older Australians, provided that certain conditions and standards are met. To address the potential challenges associated with HITH implementation, Ageing Australia recommends:

1. *Incorporating measures to support implementation of HITH in the National Health Reform Agreement* – This should include allocating resources for training healthcare professionals, evidence-based trials and piloting, developing infrastructure, and integrating advanced technologies (including telehealth systems and remote monitoring devices).
2. *Making HITH a priority project for Health Ministers* - Develop and implement consistent policies and regulations across Australia to facilitate the seamless operation of HITH. This will help overcome jurisdictional barriers and support quality care, including for older Australians, regardless of where people live.
3. *States and Territories supporting effective implementation* –
 - (a) Promote effective communication and collaboration between hospital-based and community-based care teams. This is vital for providing comprehensive and continuous care.
 - (b) Provide thorough education and support for patients and their families regarding the benefits and limitations of HITH. Building trust and understanding in home-based care is essential for successful implementation.

4. *Making HITH available at every residential aged care facility* - By delivering hospital-level care in an aged care setting, HITH helps reduce healthcare costs associated with hospital stays, including bed occupancy and resources.
5. *Developing interface with in-home aged care providers* - Develop an integrated HITH model with home care providers that supports collaboration between care workers, registered nurses, and enrolled nurses during home visits.
6. *Exploring the possibility of extending HITH into retirement living* - Invest in a pilot which will enable the Federal and State Governments to develop a better understanding of how this model could benefit older Australians, as well as any potential risks and/or implementation challenges which would need to be addressed before adopting the model in retirement living, more widely.
7. *Establishing interface with health insurance* - Apply default benefits (the minimum insurers must pay for a treatment) to HITH care so older Australians will have the option of using either the public or private hospital systems.

References

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