



# Calls for more aged care at home

**STEPHEN LUNN**  
 SOCIAL AFFAIRS WRITER

THE latest allocation of government-funded aged-care places shows the huge mismatch between what older Australians want — aged-care services in their own homes — and what is being delivered by the system.

Of the 10,493 residential care (nursing home) beds available for allocation this year, only 7933 were taken up by aged-care providers, the latest round of approvals announced by the Gillard government yesterday shows.

At the same time, there were more than 24,000 applications for community care (services delivered in the home) places, but just 1698 places offered.

While the reason for the small number of available community care places was partly historical (the government had brought forward some of this year's allocation in the previous two years), the huge discrepancy between supply and demand remains.

It led to calls yesterday to do away with the annual allocation of aged-care places (calculated on a population-based formula introduced 14 years ago) and quickly

introduce a more consumer-led approach to aged care recommended by the Productivity Commission. "Clearly the current system based on planning ratios is failing older Australians," Council on the Ageing chief executive Ian Yates said. "If we can't meet the needs of the population now, how will we cope in five, 10 or 20 years as our population ages?"

Announcing the latest aged-care approvals round yesterday, Minister for Ageing Mark Butler acknowledged the desire by older Australians to stay put in their homes and have services delivered in, rather than move into nursing homes. "Over the last four months I've met with over 4000 Australians and the overwhelming message I'm hearing time and time again is that Australians want to live out their later years in their own homes for as long as possible, if not for the rest of their lives," Mr Butler said.

The government continues to consider the commission's Caring for Older Australians report, but Catholic Health Australia chief executive Martin Lavery yesterday urged both sides of politics to quickly adopt the findings.

Mr Lavery said the shortfall in the take-up of residential beds was

indisputable evidence the aged-care system had "run out of puff".

"Older Australians want to stay in their own homes as long as is possible. Providers want to offer that care . . . but the current system simply doesn't allow it," Mr Lavery said. "The system needs to change and bipartisan support is needed for change. Politics shouldn't get in the way of this."

But opposition ageing spokeswoman Concetta Fierravanti-Wells said the Gillard government was being too slow to move on the commission's findings.

"Minister Butler is aware of the state of suspended animation but is sitting on the (report)," she said. "No one knows whether the government is going to act on any of the 58 recommendations.

"There is no certainty for the sector when the government has commissioned so many reviews but does not act on them."

Greens spokeswoman on ageing Rachel Siewert said it was unacceptable that there were 14 applications for each community care place allocated.

"Organisations are clearly very willing to provide community care services, but the current funding model is unable to meet that demand," Senator Siewert said.