



## Sunday Mail

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# Broken people, failing system, SA's shame

**I**T is often said that the measure of a society is how it treats its most vulnerable. If that maxim holds true then what does it say about South Australia that it is charging some of this state's most vulnerable citizens \$41 a day because they are occupying through no choice of their own a public hospital bed?

The frail and aged as well as those with significant disabilities who are patients in our public hospital system are being charged a "bed fee" because they have been deemed ready for discharge but have nowhere else to go. For weeks and sometimes months these long-term patients are being confined to soulless hospital rooms because there is no suitable accommodation elsewhere.

The *Sunday Mail* was alerted to the circumstances of two victims of this policy.

An elderly patient at Modbury Hospital has been told to pay up because he had been stuck in the hospital for too long, while waiting for a hostel or nursing home placement.

While stroke and bashing victim Steven Connolly finally escaped a Kafkaesque world of care limbo after spending 12 months in the Lyell McEwin Hospital. Mr Connolly was charged a bed fee every week he spent waiting for somewhere to call home. He lost his Housing Trust house and now lives in a share house with assisted care.

Just months ago we reported on two patients – Chris Woods and Paul Hughes – who collectively spent 1000 days in hospital waiting for crisis housing. While the sick are desperate to get into hospital, such beds are being occupied long-term.

Nevertheless that does not excuse the disturbing policy of SA Health, and presumably, the government, to make the most vulnerable pay for a collapsing system where people are stuck in hospital for months and months waiting for accommodation.

Have we sunk that low? There has never been any suggestion in any of these cases that the individuals are holidaying in our hospitals at the state's expense.

As Ian Yates, from the Council of the Ageing says, more effort needs to go into finding these people places, not charging them while they are stuck in limbo.