

# Leveraging Existing Data to Generate Evidence and Inform National Aged Care Policy and Reforms: **The Registry of Senior Australians (ROSA)**

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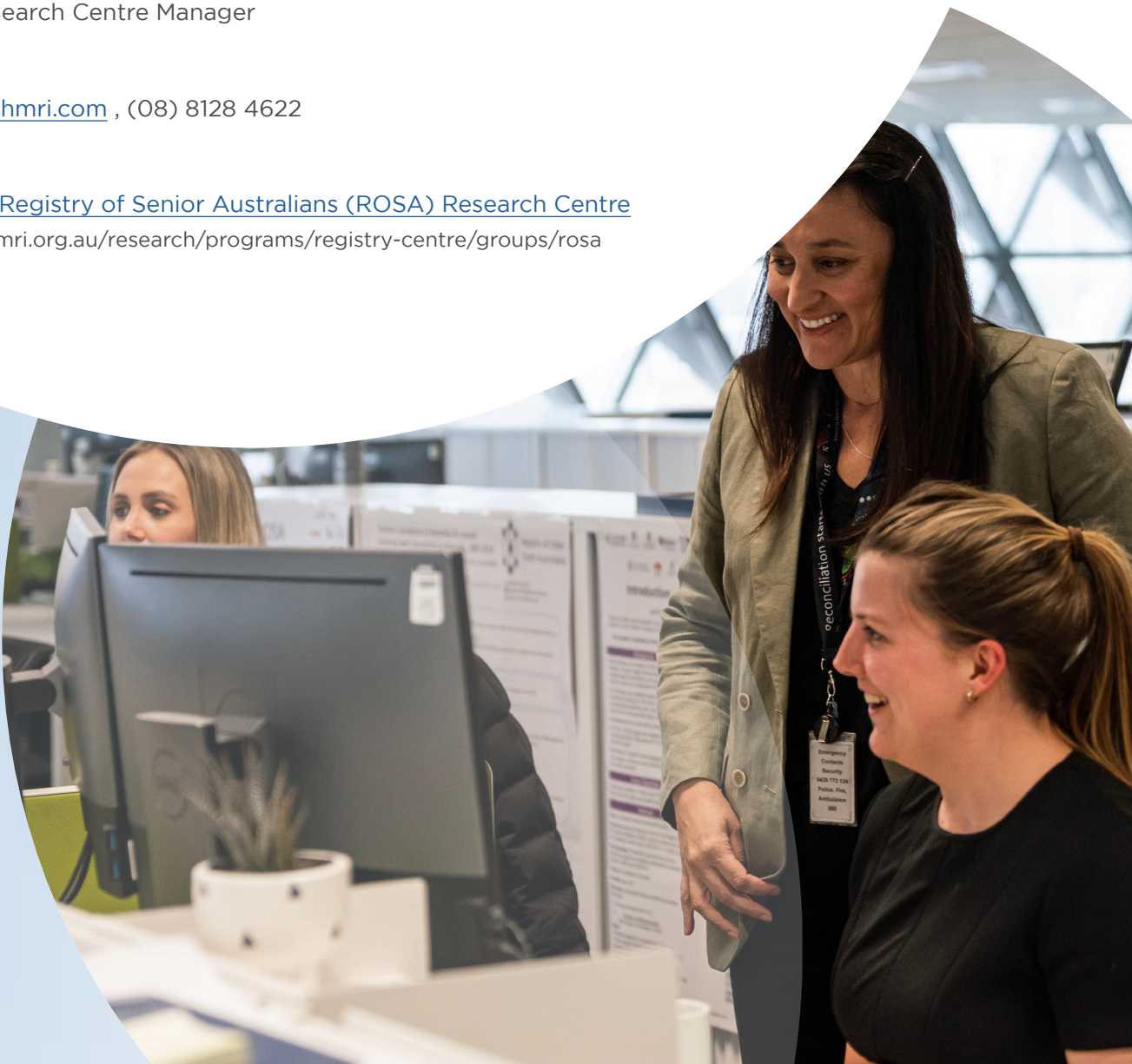
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## Impact statements

### Expansion of the Quality Indicator Program and ROSA's role in aged care reform

Previously there has been a lack of reliable, accessible and comprehensive data on safety and quality in the aged care sector, and existing data has not been adequately integrated nor analysed to inform improvements in care. The Registry of Senior Australians (ROSA) team contributed significantly to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (2018-21), providing two reports on international quality and safety monitoring and four using ROSA's monitoring system. In response to ROSA's recommendations, the Australian Senate passed a motion calling for routine monitoring and public reporting of aged care quality indicators at the service provider level.<sup>34</sup> The Commission's final report in March 2021 recommended expanding the National Quality Indicator (QI) Program, influenced by ROSA's work.<sup>35</sup> ROSA continues to provide evidence and technical advisory input for aged care reforms, including the expansion of the QI Program by informing the recent development of additional staffing and home care quality indicators.<sup>37</sup>

### Leveraging the ROSA to address overuse of antipsychotics in aged care

People living with dementia can experience behaviour changes like aggression and agitation, often leading to antipsychotic prescriptions in aged care.<sup>38</sup> Inappropriate use of these drugs was a major concern but the extent of this was unknown. The Registry of Senior Australians (ROSA) team produced two commissioned reports on psychotropic medicine use in aged care.<sup>40,41</sup> Evidence compiled by the ROSA team using data from the ROSA Historical National cohort showed the transition to residential care was associated with a rise in initiation of antipsychotics.<sup>35</sup> This work influenced the Royal Commission's Interim recommendation in 2019 for a response to the significant over-reliance on chemical restraint by antipsychotics,<sup>42</sup> adoption of changes to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme in 2020 which restricted antipsychotic dispensing for individuals with dementia<sup>39</sup> and the expansion of the Quality Indicator Program in 2021 to include a medication management indicator.

### Identifying the risks associated with long wait times through the ROSA to promote timely access to home care

Timely access to appropriate Home Care Packages for older Australians has been part of the reform agenda over the past two decades. In 2019, the estimated wait time was between three to six months for someone with basic care needs and more than 12 months for someone with high-level care needs.<sup>42</sup> It was unclear what the impact of waiting time was on those waiting for care. A 2019 study by the ROSA team showed prolonged wait times for Home Care Packages were associated with a higher risk of longer-term mortality as well as transition to permanent residential aged care.<sup>43</sup> The evidence provided by ROSA informed the Royal Commission's Interim recommendations to provide more Home Care Packages to reduce wait-time and thus, stimulated the subsequent release of 180,000 packages nationally for older Australians (2019-22) to improve access to care.

## Case study

### The Registry of Senior Australians (ROSA) Research Centre

In Australia, more than 16% (4.2 million) of the population is aged 65 years and over<sup>31</sup> and approximately 1.5 million people receive aged care services.<sup>32</sup> The Registry of Senior Australians (ROSA) was established in 2017 by a multi-institute collaborative of researchers, clinicians, aged care providers and consumer advocacy groups with the purposes of generating evidence to improve the quality of ageing and aged care services delivered to older people. The ROSA data platform contains two cohorts: Prospective cohort [South Australia only] (N=66,382 participants, 2018-2023; updated annually) and the ROSA Historical National cohort (N~3.85 million participants, 2002-2022; updated every 2 years). The ROSA data platform is built from the integration of existing aged care, health care, and social welfare datasets.<sup>33</sup>

The ROSA team had a significant role in the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (2018-21) investigations and subsequent Aged Care Reforms (2021-current), when it delivered several commission reports that informed recommendations made by the Commission and now the implementation of programs as part of the Reforms.

### ROSA produced evidence for the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care to expand the National Aged Care Mandatory Quality Indicator Program

Previously there has been a lack of reliable, accessible and comprehensive data on safety and quality in the aged care sector, and existing data has not been adequately integrated nor analysed to inform improvements in care. The ROSA team made significant contributions to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (2018-21) including two commissioned reports on international quality and safety monitoring and four reports using ROSA's monitoring system. Here, ROSA provided evidence on how to measure and monitor quality of care both in residential and home care settings using Australia's rich data landscape. In response to the recommendations made by ROSA, the Australian Senate passed a motion based on ROSA's recommendations calling on the Australian Government to implement routine monitoring and public reporting of aged care quality indicators at the service provider level to enhance transparency and accountability.<sup>34</sup> In March 2021, the Royal Commission released its final report<sup>35</sup> in which the Commission recommended the expansion of the National Quality Indicator Program, a call informed by ROSA's work.

31 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Older Australians. July 2, 2024. Accessed April 3, 2025. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/older-people/older-australians/contents/demographic-profile>

32 Department of Health and Aged Care. 2023-24 Report on the operation of the Aged Care Act 1997. November 29, 2024. Accessed April 3, 2025. <https://www.gen-agedcaredata.gov.au/resources/publications/2024/november/2023%E2%80%9324-report-on-the-operation-of-the-aged-care-act-1997>

33 Inacio M, Caughey GE, Wesselingh S, et al. Registry of Senior Australians (ROSA): integrating cross-sectoral information to evaluate quality and safety of care provided to older people. *BMJ Open*. 2022 Nov 17;12(11):e066390. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2022-066390.

34 Commonwealth of Australia. Senate. Hansard, page 3951. 25 August 2020, (Stirling Griff, South Australian Senator).

35 Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety final report - volume 1: summary and recommendations. Commonwealth of Australia. March 1, 2021. Accessed April 3, 2025. <https://www.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/2024-03/aged-care-rc-final-report-volume-1.pdf>

Following the Royal Commission, ROSA contributed evidence and technical advisory input through commissioned work for the Australian Government Aged Care Reforms. ROSA has provided evidence and expert consultation for the National Quality Indicator Program expansion, including the latest development of staffing Quality Indicators for enrolled nurses, allied health professionals, and lifestyle officers, to be implemented in 2025.<sup>36</sup> In 2024, ROSA also provided evidence to support the development of home care quality indicators which are yet to be implemented.<sup>37</sup>

### **ROSA influenced how antipsychotics are utilised and monitored in aged care settings**

People living with dementia may experience changed behaviours, such as aggression, agitation and delusions. Prescription of antipsychotics for people with these behaviours and symptoms occurs most commonly in residential aged care facilities.<sup>38</sup> Inappropriate prescribing of antipsychotic medicines is a major concern for older people.<sup>39</sup>

ROSA produced two commissioned reports on psychotropic medicine use before and after entering residential aged care.<sup>40,41</sup> Evidence compiled by the ROSA team using data from the ROSA Historical National cohort showed the transition to residential care was associated with a rise in initiation of antipsychotics.<sup>8</sup>

The work produced by ROSA influenced the Royal Commission's Interim recommendation in 2019 for a response to the significant over-reliance on chemical restraint by antipsychotics,<sup>42</sup> informed changes to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme in 2020 which restricted antipsychotic dispensing for individuals with dementia<sup>9</sup> and informed the expansion of the Quality Indicator Program in 2021 to improve antipsychotic monitoring through the addition of the medication management indicator.

The study conducted by the ROSA team<sup>8</sup> was also chosen as one of the top 10 2020 studies published in the Australia's leading general medical journal, the Medical Journal of Australia, highlighting the academic impact and quality of the evidence.

- 36 Department of Health and Aged Care. Expanding the national aged care mandatory quality indicator program: staffing QIs final report. January 30, 2025. Accessed April 3, 2025. <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/expanding-the-national-aged-care-mandatory-quality-indicator-program-staffing-qis-final-report?language=en>
- 37 Department of Health and Aged Care. Establishment of a national aged care mandatory quality indicator program for in-home aged care services consultation paper. May 28, 2024. Accessed April 3, 2025. <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/QI-program-in-home-care-consultation-paper>
- 38 Harrison SL, Sluggett JK, Lang C, et al. The dispensing of psychotropic medicines to older people before and after they enter residential aged care. *Med J Aust.* 2020 Apr;212(7):309-13. doi:10.5694/mja2.50501.
- 39 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Dementia in Australia. September 13, 2024. Accessed April 3, 2025. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/dementia/dementia-in-aus/contents/health-services-used-by-people-with-dementia/anti-psychoics-and-other-medications>
- 40 Inacio MC, Harrison SL, Lang C, Sluggett JK, Wesselingh S. Antipsychotic medicines dispensed before and after entering residential aged care: preliminary report and findings from the national historical cohort of the Registry of Older South Australians. Registry of Older South Australians. 2019. Accessed April 3, 2025. <https://webarchive.nla.gov.au/awa/20210122083647/https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/2020-06/RCD.9999.0103.0001.pdf>
- 41 Inacio MC, Harrison SL, Lang C, Sluggett JK, Wesselingh S. Antidepressants and benzodiazepines medicines dispensed before and after entering residential aged care: preliminary report and findings from the national historical cohort of the Registry of Older South Australians. Registry of Older South Australians. 2019. Accessed April 3, 2025. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/work/239409986>
- 42 Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety interim report: neglect - volume 1. Commonwealth of Australia. October 31, 2019. Accessed April 3, 2025. <https://www.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/2021-03/interim-report-volume-1.pdf>

## ROSA provided evidence and increased the urgency for the release of extra Home Care Packages for older Australians waiting for care

Timely access to appropriate Home Care Packages for older Australians has been part of the reform agenda over the past two decades. In 2019, the estimated wait time was between three to six months for someone with basic care needs and more than 12 months for someone with high-level care needs.<sup>12</sup> It was unclear what the impact of waiting time was on those waiting for care.<sup>13</sup>

A 2019 study by the ROSA team showed prolonged wait times for home care packages were associated with a higher risk of longer-term mortality as well as transition to permanent residential aged care.<sup>43</sup>

The evidence provided by ROSA informed the Commission's Interim recommendations to provide more home care packages to reduce wait-time<sup>12</sup> and thus, stimulated the subsequent release of 180,000 home care packages nationally for older Australians (2019-22) to improve access to care.

## Conclusion

In 2024, the ROSA Research Centre was nationally recognised by the Australian Government's Office of the Inspector-General of Aged Care in its inaugural statutory report on the *'Implementation of the Recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety'*.<sup>44</sup> The Inspector-General recommended *'that the government examine the potential of [ROSA] SAHMRI's work in a national context, and how it can be best supported to achieve its full potential.'* This national recognition of ROSA is reflective of how the ROSA team have pioneered the use of big data and high-quality analytics in the aged care sector.

By leveraging ROSA's infrastructure and expertise in population health surveillance, epidemiology, medical informatics, statistics, data science and combining it with significant clinical and aged care expertise, the ROSA team has provided new insights into how to evaluate cross-setting care, the current quality of care provided nationally, and tools that can be used to improve care.

43 Visvanathan R, Amare AT, Wesselingh S, et al. Prolonged Wait Time Prior to Entry to Home Care Packages Increases the Risk of Mortality and Transition to Permanent Residential Aged Care Services: Findings from the Registry of Older South Australians (ROSA). *J Nutr Health Aging*. 2019;23(3):271-280. doi:10.1007/s12603-018-1145-y

44 Office of the Inspector General of Aged Care. 2024 progress report on the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. August 1, 2024. Accessed April 3, 2025. <https://www.igac.gov.au/resources/2024-progress-report-implementation-recommendations-royal-commission-aged-care-quality-and-safety>