



The Mackay Branch of the OLDER WOMEN'S NETWORK (Qld) Inc. has approximately 70 members and is part of a network for older women. The group offers programs relating to health, personal development, information, activities and fun. It guards against social isolation by offering mutual support, caring and friendship. Through O.W.N. Queensland and Australia the group has a voice in the policies and issues that affect older women nationally.

The AIMS of OWN Mackay are:-

- To improve and enrich the health and wellbeing of older women living in the Mackay region through education, information, encouragement, support, access, equity, choice and self-help.
- To maintain an older women's network within the Mackay region to encourage enrichment, mutual support and companionship amongst older women.
- To provide information and resources relevant to older women that will promote discussion and action about ageism and sexism.
- To lobby for a fairer deal on issues affecting older women.

This submission does not claim to speak for all members but has the general approval of the group.

It is difficult to see value in extending competition to the proposed areas or what the relationship with consumer choice might be, but the following points demonstrate the concerns of our group. We believe there are much more important factors than competition in the distribution of funding.

- Many members have voiced their concern about the influx of large organisations to the town since the changes to the Aged Care system, and the methods existing services have been forced to adopt in order to survive, such as relocating all management to Brisbane.
- The small local organisations who have met our needs for generations are forced to expand or close. Those better placed for expansion are able to survive, while others must close.
- Organisations expanding quickly into new areas lack familiarity with the culture and geographical layout of the local area. Head offices allocate services with no knowledge or understanding of these factors.
- Cooperative community relationships between workers, which have developed over time, are destroyed as new organisations move into areas in search of profit, and the concept of working together is lacking.
- The dedication of members who have worked tirelessly is lost. The only reward sought by many of these people has been to improve living conditions in their own communities. Incoming services have no such motivation.
- Many very small communities suffer a loss of skills as workers on the ground are replaced by drive in services.

- There is no motivation for communities to unite to solve their own problems as they know they lack the means to compete.
- The large organisations have the means to submit highly professional and polished funding applications while the small local services are often short of time, funds, and expertise in this area.
- Competition does not provide the conditions which support innovation and collaboration. There was a recent example in this region where three organisations, from Mackay, Moranbah and Bowen, collaborated in a funding application. They had spent a lot of time learning to work together, developing priorities, shared values, and a plan for allocation of tasks, according to their individual strengths. Unfortunately their submission failed, success going to a large nationwide organisation. The result of this is the absurd situation where workers unfamiliar with the local communities frequently drive for four hours to supply a service to one person.
- It is a commendable idea that consumer choice could drive innovation but there seems little evidence of that to date. Most people seem to feel that they must take whatever they can get and there is very little diversity between services.
- As far as consumers are concerned they appear to be struggling to find their way, and OWN Mackay strives to provide them with information and support.