

Human Services Inquiry  
Productivity Commission  
Locked Bag 2, Collins Street East  
Melbourne Vic 8003

24 October 2016

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Re: Productivity Commission Preliminary Findings Report – Human Services: Identifying Sectors for Reform**

Currently, over 7000 young people with high care needs are forced to live in residential aged care facilities due to their support requirements. Youngcare Australia (herein referred to as “Youngcare”) is a not-for profit organisation and registered charity established in 2005 to respond to this housing crisis. Our mission is to ensure all young people (between the ages of 18 and 65) with high care needs have access to age-appropriate supported housing options which suits their needs. Our solutions aim to provide the greatest possible choice and control to service users, which promote independence and enable them to lead the young lives they deserve.

Youngcare appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Productivity Commission’s preliminary findings report on “Introducing Competition and User Choice into Human Services”. The report highlights social housing as a key area of reform, stating “Housing assistance provides a safety net for those that are experiencing homelessness, or who face high barriers to sustaining a tenancy in the private rental market, and plays an important role in increasing their quality of life.”<sup>1</sup> This includes better outcomes in terms of health, access to support services and employment. Given our interest and experience in housing issues for people with high care needs, this submission will focus on the importance of providing choice and control in the social housing sector.

---

<sup>1</sup> Australian Government Productivity Commission, “Introducing Competition and Informed User Choice into Human Services: Identifying Sectors for Reform,” September 2016, 24.

Through the lived experience of our service users, Youngcare remains acutely aware of the important symbiotic relationship between housing and disability support. There is no doubt that access to stable housing and high-quality support services has a positive impact on health and wellbeing for young people with disabilities. However, young people themselves have acknowledged that their capacity to achieve the best possible health outcomes depends upon an adequate understanding of how these two elements work together. For example, even with the best possible housing option available to them, it is impossible for a person with high care needs to achieve their fullest potential without an effective support structure. Similarly, the quality support that people require and deserve can only be properly delivered when the home environment is appropriate for the needs of all involved - including staff health and safety.

A major limitation of the Productivity Commission's report is that it fails to consider the extent to which housing and disability are interlinked. Although both issues are touched on separately, the discussion lacks depth and does not address the connections between them. Through our relationship with Griffith University, Youngcare has developed a robust and holistic framework that guides our service delivery. The "Livewell Model of Care"<sup>2</sup> outlines evidence-based best practice when supporting young people with high care needs across their lifespan. Its emphasis on meaningful life roles and relationships, self-determination and personalisation allows us to put our service users at the centre of all decision-making processes. This illustrates that providing individual choice and control is a core component of Youngcare's mission, which underscores every aspect of our work.

The "Livewell Model of Care"<sup>3</sup> is a "flexible response to the changing...needs of individuals {with disabilities} over time", which also has significant implications for social housing. While stability of housing is undoubtedly importantly, we would argue that needs to be some degree of portability in living arrangements - for example, the possibility to move between social housing settings if necessary.

At Youngcare, we are proactive in ensuring that people with disabilities have equitable access to the types of housing they want and need. The knowledge that we gain from Griffith University's research into the consumer preferences and housing design needs of our service users can be directly reflected and incorporated into our housing solutions. The physical buildings that we have built are specifically designed to maximise choice and control, taking into account the different housing needs of people

---

<sup>2</sup> Youngcare Australia, "Knowledge Partnership," Youngcare, last modified 2016, <https://www.youngcare.com.au/our-work/knowledge-partnership/>.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

at different points in their life. For example, Youngcare's new Albany Creek project is a joint venture with Multiple Sclerosis Queensland that includes three social housing apartments and 8 apartments for people with disabilities. This mixed tenure arrangement follows an integrative model, and uses a third-party housing organisation as a property manager. This approach highlights an offers an important sense of separation distinction between the home environment and support services, which responds to the needs of our service users.

Another example of this responsiveness would be Youngcare's Woolloowin share house. The Woolloowin share house offers many features that increase residents' choice and control over their own lives, as well as greater independence. Such features include assistive technologies and environmental controls (for example, alternative ways to switch off lights or regulate room temperatures). It is also important to note that these features are integrated in such a way as to not detract from the mainstream, personal feel of the home environment. We consider this attention to detail to be of the utmost importance, which should be reflected in social housing solutions.

This submission has sought to highlight the importance of choice and control in the social housing sector, specifically with regard to people with disabilities. It should also be noted that with the roll out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, Youngcare anticipates increasing pressure on the disability and housing sectors to implement cost-cutting measures. We continue to stress that this should not compromise choice and control. Youngcare remains steadfastly committed to these underlying values, and ensure young Australians can live their life with choice, independence and dignity.

Yours Sincerely

Melissa Morrison  
Interim Chief Executive Officer