

Seasons – simply better aged care is a South-East Queensland based provider of care services for older Australians.

Our model breaks new ground in the types of services available for ageing Australians. What makes Seasons so unique and so special is that it combines the best of *all* worlds – the independence and privacy of owning your own home, together with the companionship, security and personal 24 hour care of a dedicated aged care community utilising state of the art technology.

The Seasons model of aged care was developed to address the enormous gap between Community Care and traditional Aged Care Residential facilities by providing true choice and flexibility for ageing Australians - at Seasons these principles form the core of all the services we offer. We are the only company in Australia providing this innovative model of care for residents with a focus on specialised Dementia care which has been built on the foundation of solid research.

1. Introduction

Seasons welcomes the opportunity to lodge this submission in response to the Productivity Commission's inquiry into caring for older Australians.

This submission proposes opportunities for the Commonwealth to consider alternative funding models and regulatory requirements, which better meet the needs of the increasing ageing Australian population and therefore assists Providers to deliver innovative, flexible care based on what ageing Australians want, when and how they want it.

2. Research

There is a significant shortfall of funded care available in South East Queensland. This relates in part to the significant increase in population in recent years with people moving from other cities to Brisbane and often families who have relocated decide to relocate their older family members also, as their health needs increase.

Queensland's share of national growth is 25.5%. Brisbane remains the most populous local government area in Queensland and Australia (www.oesr.qld.gov.au). Consideration of these facts is needed in allocation of future aged care funding. The immediate area Seasons service (Cabool Region) is one of the fastest growing regions in Queensland with 57.1% expected population increase over the next 25 years. An analysis of population projections for Cabool show that in the 25 years from 2006 to 2031, population growth of people over 65 years is 244% from 38,862 in 2006 projected to 133,767 in 2031 (Source: Queensland government population projections 2008).

Australia now sees about 1,300 new cases of Dementia weekly and this is projected to increase to 7,400 weekly by 2050. The number of people in Queensland with Dementia passed the 30,000 mark in 2001 and was estimated to pass the 40,000 mark in 2008. By mid-century, the number of people in Queensland with Dementia is projected to increase to 171,000, a more than fivefold increase from 2000-2050 (from 29,248 in 2000). By 2050, there are projected to be over 41,000 new cases of dementia diagnosed every year, similar to the total number of cases in Queensland in 2007 (Report by Access Economics commissioned in 2007 by Alzheimer's Australia Queensland).

As a provider of DVA nursing and Community Care packages we estimate that we have a shortfall of funding to provide care to 1,120 eligible care recipients within the next 3 years.

Seasons is working with the University of New England and the Royal College of Nursing Australia on a research project which tracks and analyses the functional progression of Dementia in residents living in our villages. This research has led us to implement 'state of the art' technology into the homes of our residents to enable them maximum independence and flexibility whilst ensuring their safety and health needs are met. This was featured in the Brisbane Sunday Mail, 13 June 2010.



Our residents truly age in place (independent through to high care with Dementia) with care tailored for each person to ensure all their needs are met. They will never need to relocate to a traditional, institutionalised style aged care facility.

3. Service Delivery Framework

As discussed on page 14 of the Productivity Commission Issues paper, Seasons operates under a Retirement Village model however we deliver aged care within our unique model which is truly ageing in place.

It is well documented that people prefer to age in their own home and are reluctant to move into aged care as they wish to remain as independent as possible and have choice about their lives and their care. However it is also recognised that for some people there may be a time that they need 24 hour care in place.

Seasons enables people to own their own home, remain as independent as they can and put care in place when they need it. Our residents on average are 84 years of age, frail and require care with 96% of these people have cognitive impairment. Our residents stay in their home with 24 care on-site available when needed – we cater for independent, through low care to high care and high care with Dementia residents. We speak to over 700 potential residents and/or their families each week – resoundingly they are saying this is the type of care they want rather than traditional facility style aged care.

As generational change occurs, this view will dominate as our current ‘baby boomers’ will not accept living in traditional aged care facilities where there have limited choice.

We invite members of the Productivity Commission to visit and experience first-hand the innovative Seasons people centered approach to aged care, to see why we are at full occupancy and have such demand for our style of aged care.

4. Funding and regulatory arrangements

It is essential that funding is realistic and flexible to enable care to be delivered which meets the needs of ageing Australians not only now, but into the future. There needs to be a dramatic change to the way aged care is funded.

The question needs to be asked: why is the Government putting the majority of aged care funding into traditional facility based models when ageing Australians are no longer wanting this type of care? Government funding for residential aged care is on a ‘bed’ basis – aren’t we caring for people not beds? The focus needs to be more on the Community Care philosophies of people centred care. Care recipients should be able to decide how they will spend their eligible funding, as it is for them after all.

With our innovative model the injustice for our residents, is that funding can only be provided via Community Care packages, though they receive care in a 24 hour environment, therefore they are disadvantaged financially compared to traditional aged care facility funding available. Despite this, we are dedicated to providing care which is affordable to Australians living on the aged pension. We do not differentiate between those that can pay and those that cannot. All ageing Australians have the right to receive appropriate and equitable funding to meet their aged care needs.

Seasons were pleased to see the Government moving in the right direction with the recent Innovative Pool funding – Consumer Directed Care, which will support our residents better. However funding needs to go further to ensure equality between all care recipients which allows them to choose the type of care that suits them when they need it.

It is critical that these changes occur now and consideration be given to changing funding models to match innovative care models such as Seasons. Our growth demonstrates the demand for our model of aged care, its first in Australia.

To assist providers and care recipients there needs to be more support and less 'fit the box' mentality in order to get the best aged care practices. Regulatory guidelines are needed to ensure high quality care, however these guidelines need to be time effective and focus on excellent outcomes for residents and less time spent on inappropriate record keeping which takes time away from caring for ageing Australians, which is the basis of our industry. There needs to be a balance between both.

5. Government roles and responsibilities

In order to utilise resources effectively and reduce ineffective 'red tape' there needs to be one level of Government responsible for aged care across Australia and this needs to be the Federal Government. This would enable consistency for Providers who operate across multiple States and Territories. A streamlined system would enable more funds to be channelled directly into the care for ageing Australians.

6. Workforce requirements

The availability of appropriate technology for the aged care workforce is critical in order for employees to perform their roles effectively which then flows onto enabling them to spend more quality time with residents.

At Seasons we utilise advanced technology including CCTV, dementia specific technology including reed switches on unit doors, dementia lighting, invisible electronic 'curtains' and GPS monitoring for residents. These technologies enable residents to live with maximum independence whilst being safely monitored by staff. They can be switched on for individual residents as they require. In addition we are working towards maximising technology for all documentation and record keeping.

With these technologies in place it enables staff to focus on providing high level quality care and maximises efficiencies. The benefit is that staff spend increased one-on-one quality time with each resident.

The key issues with retention of staff in aged care, is the view that remuneration is at the lower end of the scale and this leads onto prospective employees thinking that aged care may not be a good career choice from this perspective. Typically the aged care workforce attracts people with 'heart' who wish to contribute to the quality of someone else's life. It is therefore critical that we support and reward staff and encourage prospective employees to consider aged care as a viable long term career option. If we don't we will not have a workforce in the future as other career options will be viewed as more lucrative.

The key to staff retention is actively valuing all staff and this comes directly from the culture of an organisation. At Seasons this culture is the key to our success and leads onto our high staff retention rate. Every employee is valued and encouraged to put forward ideas which translate into business improvements – we operate a business which is fluid not rigid. We provide staff with incentives in addition to remuneration and training. We have staff and family events. We provide uniforms and free meals, but best of all we provide a fun and enjoyable environment where people love coming to work.

7. Reform options and transitional arrangements



- Adjustment to current funding allocations based on current restrictions of Aged Care funding allocated within geographical boundaries and enable funding to be allocated to Care Recipients in a flexible way which enables them to take their funding with them when they move.
- A reform in Community Packages that increases flexibility of funding for the end stage of life and the increased care needs at this time which may include an increase in episodic short periods of high care. Appropriate Funding needs to be put in place quickly and should not be dependent on funding another package such as EACH/EACHD and going through the lengthy ACAT assessment for this.
- Adjustment of ACAT assessments to allow greater flexibility and choice between Residential Care and Community Care, reducing the needs for re-assessment if the Care Recipient moves between the two.
- Ensure implementation of new processes is timely and that information is disseminated to Providers in an effective manner.

For further information please contact;

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