



Submission from Fairfield City Council and Fairfield Seniors Network

In Response to Caring for Older Australians Productivity Commission Issues Paper – Australian Government Productivity Commission

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Background to Response

Response in Consultation with Fairfield Seniors Network

Fairfield City Council and the Fairfield Seniors Network welcome the initiative of the Australian Government to seek individuals and organisations' comments on ageing issues and issues of care for older Australians.

This response will look at the more humane aspect of aged care from the point of view of seniors at the grass roots level supporting many other seniors in their community. The seniors consulted give their time and sometimes resources to make the lives of others better. As they face the years as frail older persons who will need the community to care for them, they realise that the picture looks bleak and disempowering. They would like governments to implement strategies to prevent seniors from going through anger, anguish, pain, loss and humiliation that some of the failures of the current system place upon older people who cannot live independently anymore.

During the seventeen (17) years that the Fairfield Seniors Network has been meeting, senior leaders have also raised one overall issue at the many consultations run for different government bodies and community organisations. They state that:

“...they have loss status as they grow older and feel devalued by society. They also feel discriminated in many areas of community life and in addition, they feel that they suffer loss of many privileges that they used to enjoy during their working years. This has come as a surprise to many older people who believed they have earned the right to have a secure retirement after having worked hard, raised a family and paid taxes all their adult life, some seniors commenced work as teenagers and continued to work until retirement”. . *Many feel “they deserve better after a life of contribution to society”. “*

This response will also be supported by information compiled at recent consultations as follows:

- Monthly consultations conducted with senior leaders
- Major consultation conducted with Seniors to inform the current Fairfield Ageing Strategy
- Consultation/discussion about issues affecting carers as part of the South West Sydney Ageing and Disability Forum.
- A special consultation conducted at the beginning of July 2010 for this response

Fairfield City Profile

Fairfield City is located 32 kilometres south-west of the Sydney Central Business District and covers an area of more than 104 square kilometres, incorporating 27 suburbs.

Fairfield City's population is characterised by a high degree of ethnic diversity, with 52.5% of the population born overseas in 133 countries. The cultural variety is the most outstanding feature of Fairfield City and is reflected in the City motto "Celebrating Diversity". Fairfield City had the third highest *number* of residents who were overseas born (after Brisbane and the Gold Coast).

While Fairfield LGA has a comparatively young population with many young families, the greatest growth is occurring in the number of older residents, those aged 65 years or more. According to the 2006 census there were 20,082 persons over 65. This age group makes up approximately 9.9% of the city's total population. It is projected that by 2012 there will be over 25,500 persons over 65. this is significantly greater than for Greater Sydney and NSW.

Income levels are generally low for local residents. In 2001, the median individual annual income was \$14,660 (or \$282 per week) and the median weekly family income was \$811, representing some of the lowest incomes in Sydney. Fairfield LGA also demonstrates the some of the highest unemployment rates (12.7% of the totat population) in the Sydney metropolitan areas. This is almost double the rate for the rest of Sydney, at 7.9% in December 2005.

The Fairfield Seniors Network welcomes the initiative of the Senate to look into the cost of living pressures on older Australians. It also welcomes the initiative to hold a public hearing on the issue. The Fairfield Seniors Network will welcome an invitation to one or more of its members to give evidence at the public hearings.

Fairfield Seniors Network's Profile

The Fairfield Seniors Network (FSN) is a volunteer group of seniors from diverse backgrounds and different suburbs of the Local Government Area. These seniors support their groups in different activities as well as emotionally to break isolation and to educate them about issues affecting them. The senior leaders from Cultural and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds (CALD) also educate their members about the Australian System.

The group has been working on local issues for about 15 years and has organised many local events, activities and capacity building programs for senior leader, which have gained considerable support from the local senior community with the support and sponsorship of Fairfield City Council and collaboration from a few local community organisations.

The FSN has a high number of CALD background participants. The network comprised of approximately 25 to 30 active senior leaders or groups representatives and a few community workers working on aged issues. These leaders facilitate and represent groups of seniors ranging in size from approximately 20 to 150 members per group. This is a member base of approximately 1,500 older people. One of the main roles of these leaders within the FSN is to disseminate information gathered at the network to their members in their own language. This network provides a vital link with seniors groups in

the local area. The FSN meets monthly to share important information and knowledge and to discuss issues affecting senior leaders in the area. It also provides an opportunity for the senior community to channel information to workers supporting the network about their needs, concerns and preferences for the coordination of major activities for the area.

The FSN is supported by an Executive Committee formed by workers from Fairfield City Council, Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre, The Heights Community Services - Mt Pritchard, The Parks Community Network and NSW SLASA with attendance from other main community organisations in the area. Workers from these organisations co-convene meetings and assist in achieving the desired outcomes of the network. Lately, Community First Step's Recreational Aged Worker has joined the FSN Executive Committee.

The Fairfield Seniors Network commented about the following issues:

1. Home and Community Care Services and Community Aged Care Packages

Individuals, particularly individuals from Culturally and Diverse (CALD) Backgrounds find the Home and Community Care Program too complex to access and fragmented in its delivering, particularly when they need more than one service. Sometimes they need to call a few services when they need to find care for one person. All these organizations will ask them many questions as part of their assessments. Many people only speak enough English to survive. This creates anxiety as they usually seek help at the time when they are in crisis.

This also creates problems when they need to pay fees to all different services. For example if they need domestic services and personal care from one organisation, food services from Meals on Wheels, transport services from Community Transport and lawn mowing from another organisation. Senior leaders know of many people in the community that rather survive without services as they feel they could not afford to pay these fees or could not bring themselves to negotiate for services to lower their fees.

The other problem that these pose for seniors are that they need to let more than one person into their home and these also produces anxiety about safety.

1.1 Community Aged Care Packages.

Participants who know of Community Aged Care Packages (CACP) believed that they are a better option for seniors who require more than one service, particularly if that service is culturally competent. Advantages of CACP is that they have more of a holistic approach, taking family and carers into account and services are provided by one person (who the client can become familiar with) belonging to one organization and users need only to pay one fee for a package of services.

1.2 Long Waiting Lists for Home and Community Care services

Another comment they made is the long waiting lists for lawn mowing. The opinion was that putting funds into converting gardens into low maintenance gardens could be a more lasting solution.

1.3 Workforce Issues in Community Care

Workers, who deliver care services in the local area are low paid, are given little training and often have to travel long distances to access services headquarters that are sometimes located out of area. This is because funding has been given to big state wide or national organizations rather than to local organizations or ethnic organizations that have links with the local community. Local community workers have heard of organizations that have conducted recruitment interviews at local cafes when they first received funding. Also often workers who provide services in the home may have to travel in inefficient and lengthy travel patterns due to lack of service logistics.

1.4 Consolidate Services into a One Stop Shop Centre

Fairfield Seniors Network members felt that older people are being left behind in terms of services and meeting places, there are many Youth Centres, Women's Centres, Health Centres and Childcare Centres, but no Centres for older people to meet and get information and services. The three existing Senior Citizen Centres in the area were built in the 70's as meeting places. There are no well being centres where older people could attend physical activities with other peers or where they could meet socially or have centre based meals.

1.5 Fairfield City Council's Experience Regarding Home and Community Services

Fairfield City Council receives many daily calls from residents requesting information about Home and Community Services or they are under the impression that Council provides aged services. In addition, residents have reported that they have been referred back by aged service providers when the client request does not meet their criteria, particularly when people are looking for transport services, lawn mowing services and services for carers.

In our experience, the community has very little knowledge of local referral services such as the Commonwealth Carelink Centres or the Referral and Information Centre (RIC) formerly known as Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT).

Council has also received calls from many residents who have not found a positive response from the Commonwealth Carelink Centre. They consider Councils as resident friendly organizations from which, as ratepayers, they have a right to ask for services and information. In addition, Fairfield city Council has a pool of language aides who will help answer request when the person speak other languages.

There is a need to constantly brief customer service workers on aged services and issues as well as time devoted from the Community Development Officer - Aged and Disability to give information and refer residents to services.

Furthermore, other branches of Council, such as Waste, Open Space and Parks branches receive many calls requesting lawn mowing services.

In this area a lot of seniors meet in shopping malls or local clubs, whose main revenue are poker machines. At these places they can buy a cheap meal, get free transport (courtesy buses) but don't find a friendly atmosphere. Many ethnic communities would not go to these clubs as they don't agree with the gambling at those places. The lack of alternative venue may even be a contributing factor to the level of gambling in some communities.

Recommendations:

- That the service provision be coordinated with case management approach, particularly for complex cases.
- That more culturally and linguistically appropriate care services be provided to seniors needing more than one service.
- That workforce issues be reviewed by the funding department.
- That funding is awarded to local organizations that have links with local communities, particularly those who provide to culturally sensitive and language specific services.
- That workers be provided with a systematic management of time and locations of services through logistic approach to service delivery.
- That the Commonwealth Carelink Centres develop strategies to inform the community about their services and evaluation of the strategies be transparent and ongoing.
- That the local Commonwealth Carelink Centre employ bilingual information and referral officers.
- That the relevant department that will manage the Home and Community Care Program fund Councils to provide information and referral to local residents.
- That the relevant department funds Fairfield City Council brokerage money to employ bilingual information and referral officers.
- That services be consolidated into a *One or several Stop Shop* Centres that have a holistic approach to services, health focus and depression prevention.

2. Residential Care

2.1 Background to residential care in the area

Fairfield City has a number of residential care providers providing high care. There is also a limited number of language or cultural specific low and high residential care places. Some of the high residential care providers has expressed the concern of low demand for their services in the area and are trying to promote their services through existing community networks. Many residents, particularly those from ethnic communities have expressed the interest in accessing low care residential places in the area without success. Years ago a mainstream (English speaking) group was formed with the aim to establish a local residential village and low care residential place. Their interest was to stay in the area where they had their local connections and networks. Many were community leaders who didn't want to become isolated by going to a distant residential village, but who were finding difficulties maintaining their existing family home on their own. They did not succeed even though they approached many government departments and organizations. Since then the group disbanded when some members passed away and others had to leave their homes to live with relatives or go to a residential care place outside the area. This was also a loss for local networks. Resulting in a reduces level of input in leadership and advocacy by these important community representatives who had language and community welfare skills, subsequently loss through the lack of Residential Low Care housing options in Fairfield.

Fairfield City Council has conducted forums to inform the community about residential care options and has conducted consultations and produced the report "Residential Care Options for Fairfield Residents". This resource is available through the Fairfield City council website: www.fairfieldcity.nsw.gov.au .

2.2 The Cost of Residential Care.

One of the biggest concerns expressed at the consultation with the Fairfield Seniors Network was the cost of residential care for the older person and the family when they owned their home and the lack of access when the person did not own a home. Seniors feel outraged at the fact that if they don't have cash to leave a deposit when it would be their time to go to a nursing home they would have to sell their home. That produces a lot of anxiety for them and they feel that all they work for in life is taken by "nursing homes". Seniors are not interested in the fact that some of the bond may be returned to their estate when they pass away; the anxiety of seeing their home and possessions go while they are still alive is very distressing for them. Some seniors from CALD background said they rather die at home than go to a residential facility.

The other issue that makes seniors angry is that they believe that it does not pay to work hard to get your own house when you are young as people who live in social housing will not have to pay a bond if they don't have assets. Workers were quick to assure them that there are a limited number of places in residential

care for special cases. They still feel that the bond is a very “unfair” and “inhumane” scheme, particularly after hearing media and individual stories about abuse and neglect that goes on in residential care. They also worry about the spouse who will be left in the community if they enter a residential care place.

Seniors also commented that they believe that more welfare spending should go to people who have “worked hard all their lives and paid their taxes”. They believe it is “unfair that even people on low wages who work hard end up paying for residential care” and that “people who never worked get subsidies”.

Freda’s Story

Freda’s sister-in-law needed to go to be taken care of by 78 year old Freda and her husband after Freda’s brother, who was her carer underwent an operation. Freda herself has some health issues but could live independently in the community. She is very busy as she is a community leader in her ethnic community as well as member of the Fairfield Seniors Network. After her brother’s operation Freda and her husband needed to look after her brother and sister-in-law. After a while, she and her husband could not cope with the care and the sister-in-law needed to go to a residential facility for respite.

Freda calculated that that they needed to pay \$500 a week for 60 days, which ended up being \$4,000. On top of that they needed to pay for the brother’s medicine, transport to treatments, transport to see the sister-in-law and living expenses for both of them. All these on a pension’s income.

Another concern raise by seniors is the lack of information about fees and bond issues given to the community. Senior leaders know more about these issues due to experiences with people they help, but members of their groups do not want to hear all this information from them. They believe that it is government bodies’ responsibility to inform the community and translate information for people of CALD backgrounds.

In addition, they believe that the system is “too complex”. There is too much financial jargon involved in the information given to individuals looking for services and that alternatives of care are not explained.

2.3 Regulations for Aged Care Services

Consultees believe that residential care providers do not always abide by the Aged Care Act 1997. There are scary tales and stories in the community and media about abuses and neglect in these places. They are concerned that accreditation does not always mean that the residential care facility will meet regulations. They also believe that in many cases there may be no follow up checks on complains as clients who complain receive little or no feed back or that one-off checks fail to catch problems.

Recommendations:

- That fees accommodation charge and accommodation bond be review.
- That residential care facilities and government bodies be accountable for raising community awareness of bond issues.
- That information given to the community about residential care facilities be simplified.
- That governments create more jobs and provide more training so people could work when they are young so the divide between the “haves and have not” is reduced.
- That residential care providers be more accountable to regulation body.
- That the regulation body conduct regular check ups and follow ups.
- That the regulation body give fast follow up information to community members who complain about services to their relatives.
- That a profit cap” be introduced on profit make by residential care providers, particularly big corporations.
- That the ratio of workers to people in residential care facilities be lowered to 1:6 to prevent high demand from management as well as stress and injury to workers in the sector.
- That government play a more significant role, not just accreditation.

3. A workforce to Care for the Elderly

To address the future workforce challenges, thought needs to be given to the following issues.

3.1 Quality Work Experience Opportunities

Industry needs to offer quality work experience opportunities for training participants so as to maximize their transition from training to employment. Industry therefore plays a significant role in ensuring its own long term workforce.

3.2 Training Regime for the Future Workforce

The training regime for the future workforce needs to begin approximately five years before a person is required in a position. This allows time for study and qualification as well as mentor supported employment opportunities before the trainee is expected to work more independently.

3.2 Competitive Wage Rates and Employment Conditions

Whilst the aged care workforce faces increasing labour demand from other careers in community services and health industry as well as other service sectors, ensuring that the wage rate and employment conditions are competitive will reduce some barriers to participation in this aged care industry. Comparison of wage rates of aged care workers should be compared to other similar types of work conducted throughout the community services and health sector.

3.3 Effective Centralised Information

Communication pathways can be formed to include GP and medical centre offices, Centrelink and Medicare, are useful, however a “one-stop shop” or information portal that can provide all information in one place from all of the various service providers will be invaluable. Countless carers state that finding enough information is crucial, yet exceedingly difficult.

4.4 Training for Carers

In terms of offering informal carers the training and education to ensure their caring role is undertaken in a sustainable and safe manner, the manual handling and safe lifting could be conducted at suburban hospital facilities that the elderly patient invariably visits.