



Local Government Association
of South Australia

The **Voice**
of Local
Government

PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION

Inquiry into Caring for Older Australians

**Submission by the Local Government Association
of South Australia**

July 2010



Introduction

The Local Government Association of South Australia (LGA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Productivity Commission's inquiry into Caring for Older Australians.

The LGA is recognised as the peak representative body for Local Government in the State of South Australia. It is a membership organisation that provides quality service and leadership relevant to the needs of member Councils.

It is well documented that SA has an ageing population, at a rate greater than other states of Australia, the outcomes of this Inquiry are therefore regarded with great importance by Councils in this State.

The Submission

The Caring for Older Australians Discussion Paper comments on the interacting roles of all three spheres of government in caring for older Australians, however the actual and potential role of Local Government is barely explained.

The paper outlines the increasing proportion of government investment in a variety of quality approaches to community based care to enable people to remain in their own homes, and the need for more reforms to both residential and community care to use limited resources to cater for burgeoning and complex demand in future years.

We strongly support these directions, but urge even more recognition and support for positive healthy ageing activities in local communities supported by a robust integrated and collaborative approach to strategic planning for facilities, accommodation, services and community development lead by Council sponsored teams. A range of examples can be observed in S.A. (examples of excellence are the approaches in the Victor Harbour, Onkaparinga and Playford growth areas).

These examples will bring to bear, over time, a more effective use of resources focused on healthy ageing through socially inclusive communities. The following specific comments are made relating to the Discussion Paper.

1. Community-based service provision: Early Intervention

Funding for community support services does not reflect either the current or the future need in the population. With the retirement of the baby-boomer generation, many of whom already have chronic diseases or risk factors, the demand on services will continue to escalate.

Increased provision of accessible community-based services is a cost-effective way of managing and delaying the demand on low and high level supported accommodation in nursing homes as well as medical services.

Funding of innovative approaches to community support systems such as for example, London's largely voluntary membership based Southwark Circle, www.southwarkcircle.com.uk could generate more reciprocal volunteer involvement and more effective community support in the long term.



Councils and community organizations provide a range of services and supports accessible to those ageing in our communities. For Councils these services range from cultural and arts activities; active ageing and HACC programs; libraries: community information and recreational opportunities. In addition Councils have key roles to play in development planning, footpath construction and the like. Issues regarding safe and attractive mobility are essential for social inclusion of aged persons, and are increasingly a focus of decisions made by Councils in relation to footpath and road constructions – we need to safely accommodate gophers and wheelchairs and walking frames along with more active aged. These upgrading programmes are costly and for new developments, planning must occur ahead of time with costs consumed within the development.

There is an increasing number of retirement villages being established in SA – this is welcomed. It is important however that these facilities are built in areas where social supports and transport are accessible.

Supported residential facilities are also established in this State. It is important to ensure that these facilities are well monitored and that the management of these facilities is of a high quality, along with the staff and volunteers who support residents.

2. Aged Care Service Provision as a Career Path

It is widely recognised that human service provision, be it childcare or aged care is an undervalued and underpaid career path: higher skilled workers tend to move out of the sector into better paid jobs, leaving workers who may have low skills to provide the services. Given the current shortage and the increasing complexity of frail elderly clients with often multiple chronic diseases, it is paramount to better value older workers, target and attract younger workers, and address salary, conditions, training and support for our essential workforce.

3. Carers as Volunteers

The role of families, and others volunteering their services is a rich and powerful source of support for people staying in their community, healthy and with good social networks. With changing demographic and behavioural patterns, all spheres of government, and agencies must ensure a planned, innovative, flexible support system for volunteers and carers with a strong financial base which responds to changing demands.

Research indicates that the volunteer of the future will seek more flexibility and additional types of challenges and traditionally some of the positions held by volunteers e.g. regularly driving the community bus or delivering meals, may not be attractive to the “baby boomer” volunteer. Research needs to be undertaken and shared to assist government and other community based organizations to prepare for the future volunteer .

Respite for carers is a key issue for governments to address. These carers are important to the social and health support of ageing persons and their contribution is not recognized sufficiently.

4. Navigating the System

People lead complex lives and have multiple needs that need to be met in order to live fulfilling, safe and productive lives in the community. It is important for effective service provision and in order to produce the desired outcomes, that this mix of services is much more easily navigated by potential clients. Assistance should be available for clients to navigate the complex and confusing support mechanisms available. Otherwise those most at need, will “fall through the gaps”.



5. Consumer-directed care in the delivery of services

Consumer-directed care requires greater emphasis in the future and certainly fits with the predicted culture of the aging 'Baby Boomers'. In the areas of social support greater consumer direction is possible but in the domestic type assistance there should be more flexibility from funding bodies to ensure effective consumer involvement.

6. Common system entry points

Over the last few years there have been consultations, trials and Commonwealth Carelink. The concept of common entry points has become confused, the aim for easy access and to lessen confusion has not been met, and must continue to be a very high priority. Local Government should be considered in any new common entry point systems being investigated. Local Government is directly connected to the communities that it services, and is often the first place that people call when they do not know who/where to call. There would also be a reduced risk in service referral bias and client 'ownership'.

7. Access and Ageing in Place

Measures which will enable people to continue to live in or near their community, maximizing social inclusion, and active ageing, providing well maintained "ageing friendly" integrated/universal housing – these will maintain a level of independence and interdependence which will lessen demand on expensive supported accommodation beds. Specific priorities include:

- Reform and generation of a collaborative integrated community transport network to provide ease of access to health and other services and social and recreation opportunities as transport is still among the top priorities for improvement in social inclusion and health
- Ensure aged housing is accessible to required facilities and services and meets the changing demands of "Baby Boomer" ageing population.
- Planning for affordable local housing options to encourage local movement of older frail aged from high maintenance large homes
- Increasing funds/programs to assist older people to maintain and modify their homes and gardens to enable their continued independence as they age, so they can remain at home.
- It is also important that in making decisions regarding accommodation for persons that are ageing that consideration be also given to avoiding 'segregation'. Young people today often don't have grandparents that live locally and the rich experiences of interaction between the young and the older generations is integral. Research into mixed housing and other options should be considered..

One of the important conclusions of a recent study of older people in SA (Our Homes, Our Communities: The Aspirations and Expectations of Older People in South Australia – Flinders University Prof Andrew Beer and others, May 2009) concluded that "ideal" purpose built aged developments would have the following characteristics:

- contain groups of ten or fewer single storey dwellings that, in the main, have two bedrooms. Each development would also include some three bedroom units for persons who seek a tenure arrangement similar to outright ownership, as well as one bedroom units for the rental market as the data suggests those with lower assets are more willing to accept a single bedroom home;
- be located throughout metropolitan and regional areas so that people have the opportunity to move to purpose built aged housing that is part of their neighbourhood.



8. Caring for People with Special Needs

With the diversity of profiles of the ageing, it will continue to be necessary to address and focus on reforming, developing and tailoring programs for particular groups such as indigenous community, CALD groups, and those with mental health issues. Associated education and awareness programmes for the general community, and particularly staff, volunteers and carers should be an important component.

Summary

Local Government in SA recognizes that there are challenges ahead in supporting ageing communities. Traditional services of Councils will need to be enhanced and community based programs increased and more flexible to ensure they are accessible to older South Australians.

Councils are increasingly adopting comprehensive integrated “Ageing Strategies” or incorporating within their strategic plans objectives and plans to meet the challenges of the future.

Clearly, Councils will continue to look to community based organizations to work with them and also to the other spheres of government for funding support and research, and particularly for collaborative reforms to enable healthy active ageing, and simpler navigation and access to support for older Australians when required.