

**Penrith City Council**  
**Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Caring for Older Australians**

Penrith City covers an area of approximately 407 sq kilometres and is located 55 kms from the Sydney CBD on the main western rail line. Penrith is a mix of urban and rural environments with a population of approximately 180,000 residents.

Penrith City has been identified by the NSW Government as a regional city and services the needs of a catchment of approximately 320,000 people. Many older people are attracted to the area due to the convenient access to health care facilities, City Centre services and affordable housing options. The University of Western Sydney and Nepean Hospital are located in the local government area.

Over the next decade the numbers of people aged over 65 years are expected to nearly double from 14,103 to 24,128 within the Penrith LGA. The proportion of older people is set to increase at a faster rate than the NSW average for the foreseeable future. This population will be diverse in terms of its age and life course stage, life experience, health and financial status, cultural background and geographical concentration. This leads to a diversity of needs, priorities and lifestyle choices that will require a variety of approaches and strategies to support positive ageing.

Over many years Penrith City Council has taken an important leadership role in contributing to a more inclusive and accessible 'age friendly' City. In this role Council has adopted a strategic, planned and sustainable approach that ensures Council's work makes a difference to the quality of life and opportunities for older people in the City.

**'Planning for an Ageing Community' 2010+ Strategy**

Penrith City Council recognises the impact an ageing population will have on a range of Council services and facilities and has finalised its 'Planning for an Ageing Community' strategy. The focus of the Strategy is on identifying community priorities, achievable actions and Council's role in the planning and development of aged services so that a clear pathway is established to address the challenge of an ageing population.

An extensive community consultation process identified a range of issues and priorities regarded by older residents and local aged care service providers as the most important.

The strategy guides planning, actions and service delivery to ensure that Council can deliver suitable infrastructure and services over which it has direct control or influence. The strategy will also ensure that Council develops integrated responses on issues where Council may lead or partner with other agencies and organisations to ensure that the diverse needs of older people will be met within the City.

Council's 'Planning for an Ageing Community' 2010+ strategy will be available for public distribution later this year.

### **Appropriate planning mechanisms**

Local Government will be impacted across a range of functions and activities as a result of an ageing population. Local Government is strategically placed between the community and the other two levels of government as a key stakeholder and important partner in addressing the future needs of older Australians.

Council has an intimate knowledge of the local community and understanding of the diversity of older people. This enables Council to:

1. Provide infrastructure that contributes to the quality of the physical, social and economic environment for the local community and is conducive to the overall well-being of older people and supports older Australians to 'Age in place'.
2. Plan and provide programs and services that are flexible and locally appropriate to the needs of older people.
3. Support community participation in decision-making and development of community networks.
4. Advocate on behalf of the local community with other government and non-government organisations in relation to the aspirations and needs of older people in the City.

Council's local knowledge about local needs can assist the Commonwealth with the development of appropriate aged care services and the equitable allocation of resources across the Nepean region and within the local government area.

### **Information and Resources**

Due to the complexity of the aged care system older people often call their local council for information and referral. Council has a Community Services Directory which is available in hard copy as well as on Council's website.

Council employs a full-time Community Development Officer – Older People who works with residents, service providers, community organisations and government departments in responding to the needs of frail aged and healthy older people and people with disabilities in Penrith City. The role is partly funded by Department of Human Services, Ageing Disability & Home Care (ADHC) to provide leadership and support to Home & Community Care (HACC) service providers and service users throughout Penrith. The role also identifies emerging issues and plays a key role in supporting ADHC in identifying service gaps and needs and planning for regional and local HACC service enhancements. Advocacy to other levels of government on infrastructure and other priorities relevant to older people is also undertaken.

Council would see this role continuing to assist the community with understanding the aged care system and to provide support to both the community and service providers whilst transitioning into the new aged care system which is currently the subject of COAG negotiations.

Council provides support to a number of community aged care services through the provision of well located and subsidised office accommodation in its Community Connections Building within Penrith City Centre, and in other facilities at the St Marys Corner Community and Cultural Precinct. Council will be making further representations to the Commonwealth and State Governments for additional funding support to enable Council to continue to fulfil this critical service role.

Currently resources for health and aged care services (both community and residential) are allocated by government programs through population needs based formulae. Funding for services should increase in proportion to increases in the number of older people living in Penrith. However, this is dependent on the total pool of funding available for health and aged care increasing as the total population increases. To date, government funding has not always kept pace with population growth and demographic change. Moreover, there is commonly a time lag between population increases, funding increases to a given area, and the delivery of services on the ground.

Given the population forecasts for Penrith, it is critical that funding for services for older people be increased in response to the ageing of the population and that Penrith receive an equitable share of available funding in proportion to its population size.

Penrith's identified status as a Regional City in the NSW Government's Metropolitan Strategy (2005) will support the development of higher order services and facilities with the capacity to meet the needs of the broader regional community. This may include the establishment of government and private services providing a range of programs to the growing number of older people across the Nepean and wider region. Penrith would also be the ideal location to establish a regional "One stop shop" street front information and referral centre for residents.

Over many years, Penrith City Council has developed a cooperative working relationship with ADHC and would seek to develop a similar close working relationship with the Commonwealth to ensure local needs are effectively met.

### **Establishing new residential aged care facilities**

The Nepean Region will require an additional 1,140 residential care places by 2021 if the national planning ratios are to be achieved. In terms of establishing new residential aged care facilities, a key challenge is finding land which is both well located and affordable for service providers. As the price of land increases in established areas, it is becoming more difficult for organisations to develop new residential aged care facilities, which often require large sites and very substantial capital infrastructure. Such facilities ideally need to be well located with regard to access to public transport, shops and medical services, a need not usually met by building on the urban fringe where land is cheaper but access relatively poorer. There is an immediate need to increase places in Penrith through building new facilities. Given the long lead times, there is a need for this planning to commence immediately.

Penrith City Council is keen to progress a dialogue and a new partnership with the Department of Health and Ageing to consider how the supply of residential aged care places in Penrith might be enhanced, particularly through the identification of suitable land use and the provision of incentives to preferred “providers”.

### **Future Implications for Council**

Council recognises the choice of older people to remain in their own homes. To support this choice, universal housing design which allows “ageing in place” is a major factor along with the design of “age friendly environments”. With the changing demographic profile of Penrith and growing numbers of older people Council is progressing a number of actions. These include:

- Planning for a greater diversity of housing options to accommodate smaller households, particularly increased numbers of older people living alone, in established, urban release and rural areas
- Adapting existing infrastructure to better suit the needs of increasing numbers of older people and to accommodate the lifestyle needs of older people in areas that have to some extent been developed around the lifestyle needs of families and children
- Increasing access to community services and facilities to support older people to remain healthy, active and independent, as different residential areas experience ageing trends differently. This will be a particular challenge in relatively sparsely populated and less well serviced areas

The older population in Penrith LGA in coming years is likely to be diverse and concentrated in different areas of the LGA. The diversity of age, health status, need and lifestyle preference amongst older people will require a range of approaches and strategies to support positive ageing, rather than relying on simple stereotypes of frailty and dependence.

The benefits to individual and community wellbeing of living in a community which facilitates involvement of older people, through age friendly design, social support frameworks and accessible community infrastructure need to be considered as part of the whole cost of the aged care system. An example of this is the design of footpaths and public areas which minimise the risk of falls. This is where Council plays a significant role.

The ability of older people to lead active independent lives in their own homes with access to appropriate services and are able to participate fully in their community contributes to healthy ageing and minimises people from unnecessary hospitalisations or from prematurely entering residential aged care.

To complement Council’s provision of infrastructure role, it would be beneficial for funding to be allocated under the aged care system. This additional stream of funding would assist Councils to provide leadership to support active ageing and make a major contribution to healthy communities.