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MEMBER FOR GINNINDERRA

Mr Mike Woods
Presiding Commissioner
Productivity Commission
GPO BOX 1428
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Dear Mr Woods

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission into the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into "Caring for Older Australians".

In response the attached submission is offered, outlining the important work that the ACT Government is currently undertaking in developing strategies and implementing initiatives to provide affordable housing for our ageing population. As the ACT's rate of ageing is above the national average, with the population aged over 85 growing by almost 8% annually, there is a need to do more work, and to develop new housing options to meet this increase in demand.

It is also important that any work in this area emphasises the unique opportunities of an aging population rather than the negative consequences, and that seniors continue to be promoted as vital to the Australian community in their roles as workers, volunteers, neighbours, friends, parents and grandparents.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide a Submission to the inquiry. I look forward to the release of the draft report.

Yours sincerely

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Chief Minister

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Australian Capital Territory Government

**Submission to the
Productivity Commission Inquiry
*Caring for Older Australians***

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Introduction

The ACT Government identified meeting the diverse needs of our ageing community as one of its priorities with the release of *Building Our Community - The Canberra Social Plan* in 2004. This Plan acknowledged the commitment of the ACT Government to providing specialist care, and also to encourage active community participation by the growing 'ageing' population through an emphasis in promoting an inclusive community for all Canberrans. This overall direction has been further reflected and strengthened with the release in 2009 of the *ACT Strategic Plan for Positive Ageing 2010-2014: Towards an Age-Friendly City* which aims to create a city where older people are respected, valued and supported to actively participate in, and contribute to, their community.

This submission focuses on the strategies and policies the ACT Government has developed to address the accommodation preferences of older Canberrans, with an emphasis on ageing in place through the provision of affordable housing¹. In particular the submission focuses on the ACT Government's work in developing and implementing particular models of retirement specific accommodation that are suited to the provision of social housing to meet the needs of low income or disadvantaged older Australians.

Issues concerning carers for the elderly, and those with a disability who are aged are also addressed in this submission. Issues such as home based care, residential care and retirement villages are not discussed in detail.

The ACT's strategy for affordable housing for older Canberrans seeks to assist this group across tenures and income groups. It assists lower income groups through provision of a range of accommodation options by Housing ACT and community housing providers. The strategy aims to assist middle income groups by mainstreaming the provision of residential villages as well as continuing to work with charitable non-profit providers. Middle and upper incomes are to be assisted by being able to "age in place" through the purchase of services otherwise available in aged accommodation and by increasing the provision of accessible housing.

The ACT Context

Population growth is projected for all ACT age groups over the period 2007 – 2056 with the most notable increase in population numbers is anticipated to occur for persons between approximately 60 and 85 years of age. This population ageing is primarily the result of larger baby boomer cohorts (those born between 1946 and 1965) gradually shifting into these older age groups, compounded by falling mortality rates².

Although the current ACT population profile is somewhat younger than the national average, population growth in the ACT in recent times has been slower at the national level while the rate of ageing has been faster. For example, individuals in the population aged 85+ more than doubled, growing by an average of 7.9 per cent per year³.

¹ ACT Affordable Housing Action Plan, PHASE II, 2009, ACT Government

² ACT Population Projections 2007 to 2056, 2009, ACT Government

³ 3201.0 - Population by Age and Sex, Australian States and Territories, Jun 2009 Australian Bureau of Statistics

Reflecting national and international trends, the ACT is expected to experience significant population ageing, with those aged 85 years and over to increase to reach a total of 22,500 persons in 2056⁴.

An important consideration for the changing population is not only how much the population will change over the next 20 years, but *who* will make up this demographic. Indeed, the aged care sector will face new challenges as the demand profile for aged care services diversifies with increases in the numbers of baby boomers with higher incomes and wealth.

An ageing population has a range of economic, social and fiscal implications; however it can also create unique opportunities. While ageing is often perceived as a negative process, with older people being portrayed as frail and dependent, the reality is that seniors continue to be vital to our community as workers, volunteers, neighbours, friends, parents and grandparents.

Responsibility for aged accommodation in the ACT Government is currently spread throughout a number of agencies. The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (DHCS) is responsible for whole of government policy development and the provision of information to seniors. DHCS also provides public housing for older people. The Department of Land and Property Services has responsibility for the Affordable Housing Action Plan, and for co-ordinating the release of land for aged facilities. ACT Health provides a range of health services accessible to older people.

Policy Development in the ACT

To address the changing needs of this older population, the *ACT Strategic Plan for Positive Ageing 2010-2014: Towards an Age-Friendly City* was launched in December 2009 after extensive community consultation. The Plan aims to create a city where older people are respected, valued and supported to actively participate in, and contribute to, their community.

The seven priorities identified by the plan reflect the importance of seniors having adequate and accessible information, maintaining healthy lifestyles (which includes physical exercise and social participation), having appropriate housing and transport options, and having adequate work, volunteering, learning and recreational opportunities. It is believed that action in these areas will minimise or delay people's need for aged care.

The Building For Our Ageing Community strategy was launched in 2003 as an ACT Government commitment to working with industry and service providers to increase the quantity and reduce the time to deliver high quality aged persons' accommodation in the Territory.

The strategy's objectives of targeted land release, providing government facilitation for the developers of older persons accommodation projects, working cooperatively with the Commonwealth by matching land releases with bed allocations and improving the ACT's planning system continue to be delivered.

Since September 2007 twelve residential aged care and/or supported accommodation developments have been completed or are under construction. These developments have delivered over 650 beds and over 500 independent living or supported accommodation units. A further five developments are in the design phase. These projects will deliver a further 350 beds and 230 independent living units (ILU).

⁴ ACT Population Projections 2007 to 2056, 2009, ACT Government

In response to the policy emphasis on ageing, housing and services will need to have the flexibility to respond to the needs of a wide array of clients, from the wealthiest to those reliant on government income support. The release of the *ACT Affordable Housing Action Plan Phase II* addresses the challenges of accommodation options for older Canberrans, with the ACT Government committing to assist all older Canberrans access accommodation options through increasing supply, and enabling aging in place.

Part 1: Affordable Accommodation for Older Canberrans

The projected high growth of this population presents challenges in addressing demand for aged care. It is difficult to project the *type* of demand for these services, and to anticipate future personal choices. Additionally, barriers to the provision of aged care indicate must be identified to ensure the aged care sector can address this higher demand⁵.

In the ACT identified barriers to the successful provision of aged care include social isolation and the lack of flexibility associated with these services. While maintaining high levels of social interaction has a number of benefits, including reducing functional decline and having a positive impact on physical and mental health of older people, it has been shown that social isolation appears to be a significant issue for people once they enter a residential aged care facility. Therefore aged care initiatives must emphasise social inclusion of older Australians in order to help alleviate future health and policy implications that can stem from social isolation.

Flexibility of aged care provision is essential. The ability to utilise funds for a range of support services has been shown to increase wellbeing, as older people continue to access existing social networks and activities. However, current restrictions on various types of aged care support packages and inability to transfer between aged care support packages and still access the same services has been identified as a negative outcome of residential care. Some people who develop the need for residential care are negatively affected by lack of access to Home and Community Care (HACC) funded services which they previously accessed. Additionally, feedback from Affordable Housing strategy consultations indicated a preference of Aged Care Package recipients to be able to trade-off some services for an increase in, or the addition of, others.

It is estimated that around one quarter of the population aged over 80 (around 4, 500) will elect, where possible to move to accommodation which provides a level of care, including to retirement villages or age specific accommodation, while approximately 75 per cent (around 13, 500 people) will elect to 'age in place' (remain in their existing dwelling, or relocate to more appropriate housing within the existing suburb or community)⁶. Policies and programs must account for this progressive shift away from residential programs to support the population in their decision to remain in place, often in their family home.

The *ACT Strategic Plan for Positive Ageing 2010-2014* also underlines the Government's commitment to creating and enhancing a positive ageing experience for older Canberrans. Fundamental to this will be ensuring that there is adequate access to appropriate and affordable housing, ensuring that land releases, planning requirements and concession programs benefit

⁵ *ACT Affordable Housing Action Plan, PHASE II, 2009*, ACT Government

⁶ *Ibid*, population refers to ACT residents over 80 years of age as at 2007.

older Canberrans adequately and that public and community housing options all support the needs of this cohort.

Housing the Ageing Community

The most common household type for ACT residents aged 65 to 84 years is a couple household with their married or de-facto partner. The rise in the ageing population has highlighted a current shortage in affordable housing options for a significant number of older Canberrans. There are currently less than 2,000 aged person units available in Canberra⁷. Research by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) indicates that this trend is going to continue over the next 20 years with the amount of the ageing population classified as low income renters increasing⁸.

DHCS provides the majority of aged persons units or flats (APUs) in the Territory, providing a total of 1,475 APUs, with all tenants in the lowest income quintile. Almost 30 per cent of Housing ACT tenants are aged over 50 years, and more than half of those are over 70 years of age. More than 50 per cent of public housing APUs in Canberra are more than 20 years old, and 62 per cent of the APUs are 1 bedroom or studio accommodation. In addition to moving to an APU, public housing tenants can remain in their dwelling (which can be modified by Housing ACT if necessary) as the tenant ages⁹.

It is generally accepted that housing stress for older people is most often caused by accommodation that is inappropriate for their changing needs, including costs (affordability of purchase and maintenance), physical needs, dwelling design, or location. The successful provision of affordable accommodation for older Canberrans will require policies for the integration of housing with care and support, while managing the tension between the desire for independence and the growing need for support. This tension becomes even more acute when affordability is a constraint.

Therefore, there is a clear directive for policy action to address the increase in demand for affordable housing for the growing demographic of older Canberrans, including those 13,500 wishing to age in place. This will bring with it significant challenges for the ACT and Australian Governments, the building and construction industry, and aged care service providers, therefore, facilitating preventative action in terms of aged care provision.

Affordability and access

The provision of affordable housing options for older people in existing suburbs can be difficult as there are few vacant sites available. Large scale development costs may also be prohibitive. To facilitate affordable ageing in place there should be greater diversity and choice of housing options for older people both in existing suburbs and greenfields developments.

Affordable housing such as granny flats, pre-fabricated small housing, and dual occupancies represent a viable affordable alternative to independent living units in retirement complexes, and may also provide the opportunity for families to provide a level of low care to an older relative.

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ *Ibid*

⁹ *Ibid*

A study into demand and supply commissioned by the ACT Government in 2006¹⁰ found that there are three broad groups of older people facing housing affordability constraints: lower-income renters; homeowners who are asset rich but income poor; and those with limited assets and limited income. Subsequently a fourth group has also been identified, those with no assets and no income, or the elderly homeless.

While some of the issues for these groups may differ, there are also elements common to the majority of older Canberrans. It is generally acknowledged that housing is important to 'ageing well'. As noted by Jones et al (AHURI rental housing report)¹¹:

For many older people, housing provides security and independence, a valuable asset in later life, proximity to friends and familiar places, access to services, and a site for the delivery of services. Housing is an important resource for older people, as well as being a symbol for independence and a link with personal history and identity.

For low-income older renters, or for older people with limited income and assets, there is a limited choice of appropriate and affordable housing. Public housing is only available to those on extremely low or no incomes. Many older people fall outside of the criteria, but still cannot afford access to the private rental or retirement housing market. Those rental properties that are affordable generally do not have common facilities available, or there is limited or no support or care for older tenants.

Older Canberrans who own their own home (asset rich) but who have limited income face a different range of affordability issues. If they wish to 'age in place', maintenance and other living costs often make staying in the existing residence unsustainable. In addition, sale of the family home may not produce enough cash surplus to allow relocation to more suitable accommodation. While a number of ACT Government programs have been established to help reduce the living costs for this group, such as the ability to defer rates payments, there are limited or no affordable housing options available elsewhere within the existing community to enable these older Canberrans to move to more appropriate accommodation.

For older Canberrans on low or moderate incomes, declining affordability and a limited supply of housing appropriate to their needs reduces the capacity of their residence to provide them with security and social connection.

Any response to the demand for affordable housing for older Canberrans needs to include increasing the supply and diversity of accommodation options to suit a range of older Canberrans on a variety of incomes/asset bases, including affordable rental options. The response should take into account the type and level of external support or care required by the resident, and the resident's desire for independence (or at least perception of independence).

The supply of affordable aged accommodation should be sensitive to a person's wish to stay within their existing community (ageing in place) to avoid social isolation, while allowing flexibility to move between different housing and care packages to suit changing needs. Accommodation should be adaptable to the needs of an ageing population.

¹⁰ *Retirement Accommodation and Residential Aged Care in the ACT 2006 -2026. Demand and Supply Study: A Report*, prepared for the Chief Minister's Department of the ACT Government by Dr Anna Howe, July 2006

¹¹ *Rental housing provision for lower-income older Australians, 2007*, AHURI Final Report No. 98. Melbourne, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Queensland Research Centre.

Therefore the need to develop regulations which encourage affordable housing for older Australians may be an effective way to minimise the pressure on the aged care sector. This is discussed in greater detail below.

Designing Accommodation

An ageing population and limited supply of affordable accommodation for older Canberrans has led to the introduction of a number of strategies to increase the supply of housing options for older people in the ACT. The Affordable Housing Action Plan, released in April 2007, has built on the previous success of the *Building for our Ageing Community* strategy in removing some of the obstacles to the supply of residential aged care accommodation in the ACT. As such, an emphasis was placed on establishing a rolling program of aged persons' accommodation sites, and on identifying and removing unnecessary delays in projects for aged accommodation by streamlining planning approval process. The Affordable Housing Action Plan has recommended the continuation of the strategy by identifying appropriate development sites throughout Canberra to facilitate a mix of housing developments that enhance the provision of affordable aged housing.

Increase supply and flexibility of public and community housing

There is a need to increase the number of public and community housing properties that are appropriate to the needs of ageing tenants who cannot afford entry to the private rental market and have changing support requirements. The predicted increase of this demographic will increase pressure on this sector. Housing ACT is identifying opportunities, as part of its asset management strategy, for redevelopment of public housing sites to provide accommodation that is more suitable to the needs of ageing tenants, including two and two-and-a-half bedroom properties in existing communities. In providing independent or supported housing for older persons, providing two bedrooms can assist in maintaining people's independence and wellbeing, as it can allow for the option of a live-in carer/companion, or for visitors to stay, or for the continued co-habitation of couples who need to sleep apart due to health conditions.

Further opportunities may be identified through exploring partnerships with the community housing sector to deliver targeted affordable homes suitable to older tenants as part of their broader commitment to the provision of affordable housing.

Encourage investment in affordable retirement villages

Not-for-profit service providers currently provide more than 400 APUs/independent living units (ILUs) in the ACT, most often originally developed under the former Commonwealth *Aged and Disabled Housing Program*. Their age and condition makes them difficult to sell under loan and license arrangements and so they have previously been made available for affordable rental accommodation, or increasingly, redeveloped. When existing older rental APUs are replaced by new units, providers will generally need to sell the new units to finance the redevelopment costs, rather than retaining them as rental properties. Redeveloped APUs products have generally been marketed at prices suitable for higher income groups only.

Expansion of accommodation options for older Canberrans

The ACT Government is working to remove barriers that inhibit the market responding to the demand for affordable aged accommodation by middle income older Canberrans, including renters. Ongoing

discussions with a range of providers in the housing and aged care sector is ongoing facilitate proposals to increase the amount of affordable housing stock for older people in Canberra.

As a result of extra funding being provided through the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan and in response to the ACT Affordable Housing Action Plan Phase 2, Housing ACT has been able to expand its property development program to provide more appropriate housing for older public housing tenants by increasing the supply and diversity of accommodation options. A significant number of dwellings are currently being constructed at eight prime locations across Canberra.

The new homes are single storey with a minimum of two bedrooms and have a 6 star energy rating. This will facilitate maintaining people's independence and wellbeing, as discussed earlier, it can allow for the option of a live-in carer/companion. Some homes will extend on this and three bedrooms to further support the need of those clients who need a live-in carer.

The principles of universal design are incorporated into the building program to ensure homes meet the needs of the occupants regardless of age or disability and are capable of being adapted to changing needs. This approach by Housing ACT supports the concept of 'ageing in place'.

Future Directions for Providing Accommodation for Older Canberrans

Better support for older Canberrans living independently – Community Access Network

Many older Canberrans living independently require assistance from home and community care providers in order to age in place. Subsidised community care packages are available to people who are at risk of premature or inappropriate long term residential care. However, for older Canberrans who are not eligible for those services there are limited affordable options for home assistance. Older people who age in place may also suffer from reduced mobility, impacting on their capacity to engage in the community and maintain a positive social role.

The ACT Government is committed to the development of a 'virtual' retirement village or "Community Access Network" as such an initiative would enable older Canberrans (either renting or in their own home) to access a variety of services to assist them to stay in their own home. Such a network could draw on existing local services. The key benefit of this sort of Community Access Network would be that older Canberrans could retain the positive aspects of remaining in the community while the negatives of social isolation, difficulty in maintaining property and wellness would be alleviated.

Implementation of the Wintringham Housing model

The ACT Government is committed to establishing a Wintringham model in the ACT to respond to gaps in its service system. There are currently no service responses for homeless people as they age and their support requirements are made more complex by poor health.

There are also no specialist aged care services that cater for older people with complex needs, including those presenting with a range of issues associated with the causes and consequences of their homelessness overlaid with the need for aged care and clinical services.

Wintringham could establish this long term accommodation and support response for the ACT's older population, providing permanent pathways from homelessness and seamless transition into high quality aged care services. The ACT was unsuccessful in receiving Commonwealth support through funding for specific aged care places.

Private investment in flexible housing options - Apartments for Life

There is strong anecdotal evidence that some multi-unit development such as Sky Plaza in Woden, have a considerable proportion of residents over 55 years, and that 'vertical' apartment style living appeals to a number of older people. In circumstances where a desirable multi-unit housing product is made available for older people, then retirement communities can occur naturally as part of the overall market response.

The Humanitas model for *Apartments for Life* seeks to address this need. Designed in the Netherlands in response to older people demanding an alternative to old style nursing homes and hostels, *Apartments for Life* allows people to maintain their independence, accessing services (including medical, recreation, educational and social) on an as needs basis. This model is being pioneered in Australia by the Benevolent Society on a site in Bondi, Sydney. The project will create a new form of housing and services for older people that, unlike many retirement complexes, is very much part of the local community. The apartment complex proposed is specifically designed for older people, and includes public space and other community facilities for use by the surrounding community as well as residents. It is designed to be a place where older people can live for the rest of their lives in the same apartment with the support of health, community and other services as required.

Mainstream universal design to meet future demand

Existing planning codes require that 10 per cent of multi-unit residential developments in the ACT with ten or more units must be adaptable and accessible. The relevant code relies on Australian Standards for accessibility, mobility and adaptability. While this requirement assists in providing a certain number of accessible dwellings in new larger development for both older people and people with disabilities, there remains a limited supply of housing that is flexible enough in design to adapt to the needs of older occupants.

Discussion with the aged care sector suggests that requiring a percentage of new housing to be 'universally' designed would assist in meeting the growing need for appropriate housing for older people (for example the Apartments for Life discussed in more detail below). Universal design, as it relates to the built environment, is based on the principle that it is more cost-effective and beneficial to design and build a home that is flexible to the changing needs of its occupants. Universally designed homes are easily adaptable as occupants age.

Consultation with the building industry has indicated that the incorporation of basic universal design features is unlikely to have a significant impact on construction costs.

Home assessments and modifications

Falls at home are common for older people, and can be a significant problem. It has been estimated that around 30 per cent of people aged 70 and over who live in the community will fall each year. That figure rises to 40 per cent for people aged over 80 years. Approximately one in five of those will require medical attention. While the costs of falls to the community can be significant (the annual lifetimes costs of falls in older people have been estimated to exceed \$1 billion nationally), the result

of a fall may also lead to a loss of confidence for the older person and an inability to remain living independently.

Therefore home assessment and modifications mitigate these risks and can assist ageing in place, therefore further alleviating pressure on the mainstream and aged care services.

Additionally, Housing ACT employs an Occupational Therapist for the assessment of clients needing disabled modifications; ensuring service provision is delivered in a timely manner to older clients. It is critical that the reforms for aged care take account of the needs of people with disability who are ageing.

The Rightsizing Program

Housing ACT recognises that people's needs change over time, and that maintaining the family home and garden can often become a burden as people get older.

Older tenants can plan for their future and choose to move into older persons' homes, for many there will also be the opportunity to remain in their neighbourhoods as a result of the new building developments. Staying connected to social networks and other support are key aspects of ensuring older clients make a successful transition to their new homes. Assistance provided by Housing ACT includes financial support for removalist costs and arranging access to the support available through community care service providers.

HOST

The Helping Our Older Tenants (HOST) initiative aims to improve tenancy management for all older tenants, with an initial focus on those who are 85 years and older who are living alone. Housing ACT are working with the Council of Ageing ACT (COTA) and the ACT Office of Ageing to develop a tool that will assist them in capturing information of the services presently engaged and to assist in identifying what needs to be engaged to assist tenants to remain appropriately housed.

Housing ACT is also exploring potential policy direction around partnership opportunities with community care service providers for the flexible provision of support for tenants.

Part 2: Ageing in the Disability Context

An *ACT Government Policy Framework for People with Disability who are Ageing* is currently being developed to address the specific needs of those in the community that may face particular challenges as they age. The framework will:

- consider the community support arrangements that exist in the general community;
- consider how life planning can include issues of ageing;
- consider the pathways to generic services;
- include consideration of a range of options, such as the use of family trusts to ensure future support for people with disability.
- inform funding models in relation to Disability ACT provided and funded services; and
- include an *Ageing in Place* policy.

Some of the issues raised in consultations on the Policy Framework include:

- The need for specialist assessment, similar to ACAT, for people with disability in the community to assess the need for increased supports at any stage in the life cycle.
- The need for more education and support for people with disability and their families/carers about their best options in relation to decision-making for treatment and care
- The need for appropriate support to enable social inclusion of people with disability who are ageing on a daily basis. People with disability are less likely to access mainstream community activities, in particular activities for seniors. This is impacted by the level of acceptance and inclusion of people with disability in social groups, access to affordable transport and skills of staff running activities.
- Premature ageing is a significant factor affecting many Aboriginal people with disability and is a strong concern for carers. Early identification of risk factors for premature ageing and implementation of culturally appropriate care is critical for improving the health of Aboriginal people with disability in the ACT.
- The need for long term data collection and planning for the future needs of people with disability who are ageing, which is supported by consistent assessment of the ageing needs of people with disability across the disability and aged sectors; and common data collection, analysis and planning across sectors, which is built on common definitions and views of ageing
- The need for futures planning for individuals and their families which includes advice about financial planning (including transitioning to a pension), accommodation options and support options.
- The need to support appropriate transitions of people from the disability services system to the aged care system, including disability service providers and aged care providers in relation to assessing and supporting people with disability who are ageing.
- Access to affordable specialist health eg, nursing care is an issue for people with disability who are ageing. Ageing and health plans need to be in place. When people lose their job due to illness or declining disability there is often a need for people who are ageing to see specialists, however the delay in receiving a health care card means that they are unable to access specialist health care.

A key issue for ageing people with disability leaving employment is what they transition to. The response needs to be a collaborative one across disability, aged and community services sectors. Participants note there is currently a lack of accessible meaningful community activity for people with disability who are ageing. This needs to be addressed through:

- An expansion in the provision of transport to community activities;
- Assist supported employment agencies to transition clients into meaningful retirement ,
- Partnerships between disability services and community agencies to foster linkages and build the inclusion of people with disability; and
- Disability awareness training for community agencies, including senior citizens clubs, on welcoming and making their services accessible to people with disability.

Part 3: Caring for Older Canberrans

The ACT Government considers that the usefulness of the final recommendations would be supported by formal recognition of the role of Carers and in particular consideration of synergies with the Commonwealth Government Carer Recognition Framework.

This approach is also consistent with the recommendations of the House of Representatives Inquiry into better support for carers *Who Cares* (2009) which identified the importance of formal recognition in supporting Carers.¹²

The Issues Paper notes that “most of the care provided to older people by partners, family, friends and neighbours is unpaid”.

Care Transition

The time of transition to residential aged care can be a difficult time for carers and families. There is growing recognition that policy measures responsive to the diversity of caring roles, and geared around key transitions, are likely to be most effective in supporting carers and older people through changing circumstances.

Some of the key transitions include:

- At the onset of disability, illness or dependence.
- Transition of adult children from disability services to aged care.
- On discharge from hospital.
- At the end of care (when the person cared for dies or moves into institutional care or overcomes their illness/disability to the extent of no longer needing a carer).

The ACT Government supports several programs designed to facilitate more respite opportunities, home care support, and one-on-one counselling and guidance for carers at transition points are priority areas of continuing, and growing need, in the future (for example, the jointly funded *Respite for Older Carers* program).

Streamlining access to information

Access to a streamlined information service can assist carers to navigate the complexities of the aged care system.

¹² Recommendation 4 and Recommendation 5, *Issues Paper, Caring for Older Australians, 2010*, Productivity Commission.

There is evidence that early access to accurate, relevant and timely information about counselling, eligibility, mediation support or dispute resolution can support transitions in care.

In recognition of this situation the ACT Budget 2010-11 included provision for the establishment of a Carers Advocacy Service to improve access to services and supports for carers in the ACT. The establishment of the Carers Advocacy Service is a direct request from carers in the ACT. The need for a one-stop-shop to provide information, education and support to carers and their families is supported by sociological research.

This approach recognises that the interface with community and government service systems is at times a bewildering process that may result in carers being isolated from services and supports.

Better access to streamlined information about the aged care service system is consistent with the NHHRC's A Healthier Future for All Australians: Final Report which supported a redesign of health services which ensured that this complex array of services is well coordinated and integrated. (2009, p. 102).

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