



**SRS**  
*Enhancing Lifestyles*

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## *Committee of Management*

### **CARING FOR OLDER AUSTRALIANS SUBMISSION**

Growing old is part of living. Growing old is not a disability. Australians are living longer and placing pressure on Governments to provide better care in their golden years. Many of our older citizens enjoy levels of health which allow them to live independently thus saving the cost of nursing homes and associated health costs. In fact the greatest danger to their health according to Professor Bill Von Hippel from University of Queensland is loneliness.

Socialisation is at the heart of individual retaining high functioning whether in good or poor health. Many community clubs provide meaningful opportunities for socialization. It is in the financial and moral interest for Government at all levels to support organisations offering social programs for seniors.

Various levels of government support participation in these organisations through discount bus and rail travel as well as taxi vouchers for the infirm. Clubs are also able to apply for funds to improve their clubs and maintain their viability. The Brisbane City Council funds a GOLD program to enhance the lives and skills of local seniors. The cost of treating health problems would be much greater than the cost of socialization strategies.

#### **Recommendation:**

- **That opportunity for seniors to socialise in a wide range of situations should be enhanced by increased funding.**

Day Respite Services provide an important opportunity for socialisation for frailer seniors. To this end qualified Diversional Therapists should be employed. The pay structure needs to be sufficient to attract suitably qualified staff. Sherwood Respite Services Inc (SRS) is a registered charity and has a collective agreement that allows staff to salary sacrifice yet maintains their level of superannuation thus attracting qualified staff. Excursions and a holiday program provide extended socialisation and keep seniors in touch with the community.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. **That favourable taxation treatment of not-for-profit organisations should continue.**

- 2. That Traineeship for Certificate 4 qualifications in a relevant area such as Leisure and Health should be made available.**
- 3. That a more equitable pay scale be implemented to attract and to retain qualified staff.**

The greatest problem is that some frail seniors are not able or do not wish to access day respite programs that provide socialization because they have received EACH or CAPCS packages and are not allowed access to the HACC funded service. Domestic care such as cleaning, laundry, shopping and help with meals and personal care such (help with dressing, eating and toileting) are prioritized ahead of social participation as would be expected. The pity is that social participation provides many health benefits that may require less reliance on medication and personal care.

Anecdotally day respite as a terminology causes seniors to reject the service. SRS has not been able to find an alternative name for the service other than to shorten the name to initials, but individuals are missing out on a very helpful service because of the stigma of the name.

**Recommendations:**

- 1. To solve the funding matter all funds should be in one package. To roll EACH, CAPCS, HACC and nursing home care into one would cut administrative costs.**
- 2. Funding should be directed at the individual so that a package could be planned to meet that seniors needs. This would mean that if they wished, a senior could stay in their own home with support instead of entering a nursing home.**
- 3. To find a different name for day respite services at government level, for example Day and leisure Health Centres.**

At first glance having a person cared for in their own home may seem high cost, but buildings provided through government funding of nursing home beds, begin to deteriorate and become outdated as soon as they are built. The support could be means tested and a tax deduction provided for those who remain in their homes or with families. The government has already addressed day care funding for children in a similar way.

**Recommendations:**

- 1. Qualified Diversional Therapists should be funded separately for nursing homes and hostels so that meaningful programs that support socialisation occur.**
- 2. Alternatively a ratio of Diversional therapists to clients should be set to allow for appropriate programs to operate during the day.**

SRS has a ratio of one therapist for every eight clients. Just as in a Day Respite Service the Diversional therapist could help clients with morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea and toileting. Excursions and holiday breaks could be planned for the more able. This would mean that the number of nursing staff could be limited during the day. The only other staff required during the day would be management, administration, kitchen, cleaning and grounds staff. A smart organisation could employ staff that were multi-skilled to do say kitchen and cleaning or cleaning and grounds.

Second to socialisation is mobility as this supports a person to remain independent.

**Recommendations:**

- 1. Physiotherapy and podiatry should attract a Medicare rebate for those who are seniors.**
- 2. Tai Chi could also be a funded program in day respite and nursing homes.**
- 3. Mobility devices should also be funded or be tax deductible for the more financially able.**
- 4. For those who choose to remain at home devices such as hoists and appropriate beds and any other health and hygiene needs should be similarly treated.**

Bonds for nursing homes are an issue. If a nursing home goes into receivership then bonds may be lost. This leaves the client with no funds for their next placement.

**Recommendation**

- Bonds should be paid in a manner to fully protect the asset.**

A further issue is elder abuse.

**Recommendation:**

- That more effective legislation and regulations need to be developed to protect older Australians as current legislation is weak and not transparent.**

It is vital that aging is not considered a disability so the government department caring for older Australians should have careful consideration and never be part of a disability service. The recruitment of government staff for that department should include those with qualifications in the field.