

To Productivity Commission

agedcare@pc.gov.au

Dear Commission,

The Australian Osteopathic Association represents the interests of osteopaths practising in Australia. There are almost 2000 registered osteopaths, most in practice.

The osteopathic discipline is very science-based. You need a five-year Master's degree to be registered. Much of that five years is given over to teaching the same range of subjects offered to medical undergraduates.

The mode of treatment offered relates to the musculo-skeletal system. By manipulating, in a gentle way, a variety of conditions can be treated successfully.

Many of these conditions will worsen with age. Arthritis, osteoporosis and back conditions can all be treated. A "cure" may not always be achievable but, especially for older people, significant mitigation can be obtained.

There is an apparent assumption in your draft report that the only health services that can help older people are those mediated through the orthodox hospital and medical practitioner channels. This is not necessarily the case. Our waiting rooms are full of people who freely choose our services, and freely accept that have to pay for them.

Older people would benefit greatly from better access to osteopathic treatment. Other things being equal, we believe many would choose that modality.

Other things are, however, not equal. The hospital and medical practitioner sectors are heavily subsidised, through Medicare or otherwise. All citizens pay the Medicare Levy and contribute to consolidated revenue through taxation. If they exercise their freedom of choice they are penalised. Very few, and very limited, osteopathic services are funded by Medicare and those that are are provided only on the say-so of a medical practitioner.

The recent proposed reforms to the health system have paid no regard to so-called "alternative" or "allied" health professions, beyond a bit of lip-service to some "allied health professionals" in the proposals relating to "Medicare Locals". These references, however, never mention osteopathy.

The osteopathic profession in Australia is based on the small private practice. There is no lack of demand for our services; our waiting rooms are always full. The demand is there. The market is working. It is, however, failing when it comes to disadvantaged groups, including the elderly, many of whom lack independent means.

We respectfully ask the Commission to take careful note of the part osteopathy and other so-called "alternative" medical modalities play in the provision of health services to older people, and how we could do a great deal more.

Yours sincerely

Damien Guengerich  
President

Australian Osteopathic Association