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## SUBMISSION

### RESPONSE TO PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION'S DRAFT REPORT: *CARING FOR OLDER AUSTRALIANS*

We share the Commission's stated focus "... on enhancing the wellbeing of older Australians — promoting *independence*, *connectedness* and *choice*." (emphasis is ours. Ref Key Points, para 4, pXX ).

We are concerned that the needs for *independence*, *connectedness* and *choice*, and particularly for vulnerable older Australians, remain at the forefront of the Commission's mind, and the mind of those charged with considering and implementing the Commission's recommendations.

#### RECOMMENDATION

**We therefore recommend that proposed reforms, and later the derived systems and their outcomes, be tested against how well they promote:**

- **Independence**
- **Connectedness**
- **Choice**

#### 1. CONNECTEDNESS AND INDEPENDENCE

While UnitingCare East Burwood Centre is small, we have learnt that connectedness and independence have a major impact on mental health (anxiety and depression).

Our experience demonstrates that with the right supports older people can live at home and be diverted from an early placement into care facilities. This is not only better for the person and their family, but also less cost to the community.

##### 1.1 Case Study

An older Australian lady of Italian background in her 80's who, although blind and her husband had recently died, was living at home because of significant support from her children.

She did little at home during the day, mainly sitting in her chair listening to the radio. She was still grieving the loss of her long time partner.

However the demands placed on her children for her care were impacting on their marriages and relationships forcing them to consider residential care.

Placement in UnitingCare East Burwood Centre's positive living programs has given her an opportunity to get out during the week. She enjoys participating in the exercise program, loves dancing and singing to the Italian songs when they are played. She enjoys the companionship of all those the group . She loves to share the stories of her life and has shown people the needle work that she used to do before she lost her sight.

Our Program workers found out she loved to knit but had not done so because she lost her sight. They now have her knitting again with help only needed when "casting on". This will be something she will now be able to do when she is at home as well.

This may sound insignificant, but it has helped this lady once again feel connected with people, to manage her grief and subsequent depression while taking considerable pressure off her carers. The cost is minimal by comparison to residential care.

## **2. CHOICE**

From our experience, choice is not just a matter of which residential care to enter, it is also about the type of care (including preventative, as well as restorative and rehabilitative, and residential care), and practical ways to access that care.

### **2.1 Flexible and Innovative Service Models**

Flexible and innovative service models with a focus on maintenance and redevelopment of skills help provide a wide range of choices.

Support needs to be provided to services that can provide such models. "Medicalised" and "Big" is not always better - or cheaper!

### **2.2 Practical Access to Transport**

Practical access to transport is vital for real choice to be exercised. The best preventative, restorative and rehabilitative services are of little value if they are difficult to physically access.

Most clients attending UnitingCare East Burwood Centre can not get here without assistance. While there are public transport services available (bus, tram, taxi) they are difficult to access or come at a cost which some clients can ill afford (even the cost of a half price taxi).

We fall back on the good will of the staff and volunteers to transport clients to ensure they can have access to the Centre. This is a concern and should be taken into consideration when reviewing the total system.

## **BACKGROUND**

Rooted in and serving the local community, UnitingCare East Burwood Centre is small, integrated, and responsive with a significant percentage of volunteer workforce, and local financial support.

We provide emergency relief, psychological counseling, family services, planned activity groups (aged care), no interest loans, homework groups, information and referral, community classes (computers, exercise etc).

The Centre's genuine caring, "family home" atmosphere, and its paramount focus on client care enables us to react quickly and focus on the practical, real needs of our clients.

These core values and its ability to provide practical assistance are what makes the Centre a trusted and vital participant in the local community.

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