

March 2011

### **Productivity Commission Inquiry into Aged Care Caring for Older Australians**

CO.AS.IT. SA welcomes the opportunity extended by the Productivity Commission in making the following submission to the Caring for Older Australians Inquiry. Our submission will focus on the needs of our Ageing Italian Community.

Comitato Assistenza Agli Italiani - CO.AS.IT. (SA) Inc. is a collaborative support body for Italian Aged Care and Welfare Services in South Australia, it was developed to support Italian community services with the rapid growth in aged Italian Australians. Our vision is to promote a collaborative approach to service providers providing quality, culturally and linguistically inclusive services that enable older Italian people to continue living as valued members of the community to enhance their quality of life.

CO.AS.IT. is a collaborative initiative to support existing programs and respond to the growing demand for services. The formation and support of CO.AS.IT. has been through the work of the following organisations;

- CIC—Coordinating Italian Committee,
- APAIA—Association of Pensioners and Older People in SA,
- ANFE—Association of Emigrants and their Families,
- Saint Hilarion Aged Care,
- IBF—Italian Benevolent Foundation,
- PISA—Italian Meals and Services for the Elderly and
- NIC—Northern Italian Community

The number of older Italians in the South Australian community is growing at twice the rate of the other communities, and faster than other groups who came to Australia after World War 11. According to the 2006 census, of the 22,463 Italian born residing in the state well over half (55.4%: 12, 446) are over the age of 65 years, with 823 over the age of 85 years. If we take into consideration the fact that, at the time of the 2006 census, the age groups with the largest number of Italy-born were 65-74 years (6,966), followed by 55-64 years (5,608), we can predict then that at the next census (2011) the percentage of Italy-born 65 years or older will again rise. This means that in the coming years, the number of elderly Italians requiring support services and assistance will intensify and as a result there will be increasing need for more funding from the Government in order to maintain, and most importantly, increase services available for this particular culturally specific group.

It is a known fact that older Italians want to stay in their own homes for as long as possible. Prior to seeking services the majority of Italian aged manage with the support of family, it is only when a crisis arises or the family is no longer able to provide the needed support that they seek formal services, that are culturally appropriate.

This disadvantages them, as with all services and particularly culturally specific services which have long waiting lists to access services. There are not sufficient services that can maintain our Italian aged to live in their own homes.

The HACC Italian specific programs have huge waiting lists and are not equitably available in all regions. These are one of the first services that older Italians seek as they provide minimal hours of service such as home help, personal care, shopping assistance and social support.

As their frailty increases and more hours of service are required these should be streamlined and CACP's should be available as with the EACH packages. Both of these are in short supply and again not equitably spread. For the majority of our older people they have difficulty and require assistance to navigate the complex aged care system and multiple assessments and the re-telling of their story is time consuming and frustrating. There needs to be changes to streamlining the assessment process.

Older Italians can be well maintained in their own homes if these services were increased and equitably spread. Therefore decreasing the requirement of requiring high level care early on and only accessing residential care when these services can no longer meet their needs.

English language proficiency greatly affects access to information and services. Older Italians require information in the language that they fully understand, on a one to one basis. Government departments and mainstream services allocate huge amounts of funding into translating and interpreting services which are very costly and often ineffective. Because of the high cost some agencies are reluctant to use the translating services. People tend to look for services when they need them, and want a person who speaks their language to explain the complexities of services to them. Employing bilingual workers to provide the information and assist them in navigating the system is definitely the best option. While interpreting and translations are of importance in getting the basic information It would be interesting to have the data into how much the interpreting and translation are utilised and prepare a cost analysis against employing bilingual workers.

In relation to the proposed Australian Seniors Gateway (draft recommendation 8.1) this needs to worked in partnerships with specific CALD services who can provide the language assistance. Even if a person has a reasonable command of English over the phone conversations are usually avoided and older people seek the services of an aged care language specific provider in accessing services. Some older people who seem to have a good command of the English language will sometimes say they have understood everything even if they haven't to avoid embarrassment or having to re-tell their story again.

There is a need to increase bilingual workers working with established Community agencies and establishing culturally appropriate information officers. The information officers can then be the link between the person needing services and the ASG. While mainstream service providers have

found it difficult in attracting bilingual workers, the ethno specific community agencies have not experienced the same difficulties.

The problem faced by the ethno specific community agencies is that they have to invest resources in training the workers. The aged care industry should be able to cater for the diversity in all client groups ensuring that services are delivered in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner.

There is a strong need to increase the bilingual workforce and more resources into upskilling staff. Some agencies can attract many bilingual staff but require the resources to be able to train them appropriately. CO.AS.IT. SA/FILEF has been successful in providing a Carer's Project funded by the Italian Government to upskill bilingual staff with Certificate 111 in Aged Care and Certificate 111 in HACC. This very successful project has enabled new skilled bilingual staff into the workforce and the project model can be used to upskill many more workers if funding were available.

Better training needs to be completed by all staff in the areas of mental health, dementia care, palliative care and preventative health to enable the workforce to better meet the needs of our ageing community. Another important workforce issue is the salary of staff in the aged care industry, this needs to be reviewed and increased to retain and attract new staff. New incentives and initiatives need to be put in place to attract a younger demographic and the profile of working in aged care needs to be better promoted as a positive, rewarding and exciting field to work in.

The CO.AS.IT. Board and staff welcome the opportunity to further discuss these concerns and areas for improvement.

Sincerely

Gianna Vorassi

CO.AS.IT. (SA) Inc. President