

*Introduction from the
president*

Val French AM

Older People Speak Out

*Submission to Productivity Commission
Inquiry into Caring for Older Australians
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Introduction:

One of the biggest present problems of age care is that it is server rather than consumer driven. In no other industry is the consumer so constantly ignored.

The various financial solutions so far put forward to the Commission are unhappy examples.

Solutions need to be based on what is best for the consumer, what the consumer, 70 plus, says they want and need. Who better to know this?

OPSO is made up entirely of volunteers who are all seniors and come from a variety of backgrounds and organisations. Therefore our recommendations are based on the views of such seniors. We are the age group to which these services are directed.

We believe that the present range of solutions are industry based.

This paper puts forward consumer based recommendations for your consideration in the belief that such services must be consumer driven.

OPSO believes that nothing more clearly shows the failure so far to understand this age group than the proposal that the very frail aged should sell or reverse mortgage their home in order to pay for nursing home care.

These are the generations who suffered the Great Depression and the World War 2: they went without, and afterwards were determined at all costs to pay off their home for their old age, and to ensure they leave the home to their children so they would not have to suffer as they had done in their younger days.

There is also the possibility that the older person may prefer suicide than lose the family home.

To take this away is emotionally destructive. It is also opening the gates to elder abuse within less caring families.

There are better options.

We recommend that an agency be established to oversee the renting of the client's home.

This will provide income towards nursing home care. Income for such a purpose would be exempt by Centrelink for those on a pension.

This has the advantage of keeping the family home, and the additional advantage of adding to the rental market.

**Val French AM
President**

Response to Delivering care to the aged – workforce issues:

OPSO approves the proposal to provide better support to informal carers and the measures suggested to improve their quality of life.

It is noted that there is an expectation of an increase in volunteers working in the aged care industry. While this may be correct, it should not be assumed that volunteers WILL pick up any opportunity of volunteering in the aged care industry.

1] Many volunteers are mature aged retirees and fast approaching the age of the people they are caring for and many choose not to be confronted with evidence of their own frailty, and

2] Volunteers require extensive support and training as well as human resource management and programs need to be adequately funded to provide this for them, and

3] Volunteers should never be used to deliver services of paid professionals; this is a dangerous practice leading to poorer outcomes for our aging people in care.

It is also noted that recognition has been given to problems emerging in the formal aged care system. Many private facilities have been using cheaper workers from overseas countries with poor English – this practice is very upsetting to the elderly in high care as they are confused already by the changes in their lifestyle and existing hearing and speech problems can worsen. In fairness to these workers, they should be offered access to appropriate language development courses and training in working specifically with older people with higher care needs. There is a growing need to raise awareness of possible career opportunities with appropriate career paths for young people leaving schools, colleges and universities to consider working in the aged care industry as a whole as well as considering working as gerontologists – a very great need in this country. Cities like the Gold Coast have only one to two gerontologists for one of the largest concentrations of older people in Australia.

Charging and paying for the delivery of an appropriate aged care system:

Much talk is given across the whole proposal on simplification through ‘gateways’ – where does the existing excellent scheme of Carelink fit into this? There are many services and products already available but the community is still under-informed about them or chooses not to take the information on board. Education about options available to people as they age should form part of any health and aged care reform agenda. The value of retaining individuals in their home in their communities cannot be written off when costs of care are spiralling beyond the governments’ and private sectors’ capacity to meet the real needs of people as they age. Bringing aged care service delivery back down to the community ‘grass roots’ level enables both a better informed, inclusive community for our ageing population as well as allowing services to be better tailored to meet the individual’s real need.

If an individual is supported to remain in their own home then services should be delivered in a timely manner by people who are part of the community where that individual resides. A move towards providing individuals with the funding to purchase their own services needs to be well thought out to avoid the issue of people putting

themselves in danger through lack of knowledge of their own real need rather than a perceived need which could be clouded by emerging dementia.

Many of these people particularly those in their late '70s have acquired their assets through many years of hard work following the Depression and World War 2. Their home has a very strong role in how they perceive their life to be successful or not and having to dispose of it prior to their actual death can lead to higher mortality rates or higher rates of morbidity. Any arrangement that the government makes in making people turn their assets into care funding should be considered very carefully and alternative options to disposing of their home when they need to have high care should be considered and explored more thoroughly. These people have contributed to our society through the payment of taxes etc and should be entitled to some government support as they age.

Aged-friendly housing and retirement villages.

The report recognises the importance of age-friendly housing and environments for individuals but also acknowledges the failure of sufficient home maintenance and modification schemes in all States. This needs to be adjusted as soon as possible to allow more people to remain in their own home as often this is the reason they have to move into care sometimes rather than actual health issues.

While the governments pride themselves on consulting with people about proposed change, they really should be targeting this consultation to those who are going to need these services now or in the near future.

Investment by the private sector should be encouraged by appropriate legislative changes nationally so there is consistency in the type of accommodation available and the costs attached to it. There is a lot of misunderstanding in the community about the various levels of retirement and aged care living. The majority of people do not understand what they are and what is actually available. There could be some incentive to retirees to develop a care plan before they need it so that they can take preventative health measures to lower possible future high care needs.

Rental aged care facilities are rare on the ground and again this lack leads to people occupying unsuitable and often unaffordable rental accommodation in the general community. This ties up housing for the community and again contributes to faster health degeneration in some people.
