



NSW Neighbour Aid & Social Support Association Inc.

18th March, 2011

The Commissioners
Productivity Commission
PO Box 1428
Canberra City ACT 2601

Dear Commissioners,

Response to Productivity Commission Draft Report “Caring for Older Australians”

On behalf of the NSW Neighbour Aid & Social Support Association (NASSA), I submit this response to the Productivity Commission’s “Caring for Older Australians” draft Report.

Who we are

NASSA is the peak organisation for providers of Social Support services under the Home and Community Care (HACC) Program in NSW. NASSA was established as the Neighbour Aid Association in 1993 by a group of Neighbour Aid workers with the objective of providing a support network for members across the state and to represent their interests to funding bodies.

Since then, our Association has incorporated the Social Support service type developed by the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care and our membership has grown to over 100 organisations.

NASSA receives no recurrent funding and is managed by a voluntary Executive Committee of service managers who are elected annually.

The importance of Social Support Services

The funding of Social Support Services is a vital component of the current HACC sector and one that must be preserved in the future.

Neighbour Aids have been providing Social Support type services in NSW for over 50 years. Social support services are described as providing accompanied activities with the view to enabling aged people to maintain their social networks and keep

engaged with their community. Neighbour Aids provide their services, using trained volunteers and paid staff, in an environment of trust that encourages aged people to develop their own independence and enhance their confidence.

Neighbour Aid Social Support services include accompanied shopping and bill paying and organized social activities in small groups of people with shared interests. These activities are varied according to the interests of the aged people and the resources of the organisation and include card games, visits to local cafes for morning coffee and cake, book clubs, chat groups, seeing a movie or having lunch at the local club.

All these activities provide a safe environment for aged people to connect with each other and their community.

Improved Health and Well-Being

The benefits of maintaining social connections for aged people are well documented. As people age and their ability to engage with their friends or in their community is reduced, this often leads to social isolation or exclusion. The effects can be significant for the aged person, causing deterioration in their health and well-being and having an impact on mortality and morbidity.

When an aged person has access to social support services that are individualized to encourage their re-engagement with the community, the benefits in physical and mental health can be considerable.

Wellness or Active Service Model

This model of service provision is now recognized as the preferred approach for service providers as it promotes independence and focuses on what aged people can do rather than what they cannot do. The Social Support services provided by Neighbour Aids fit very well within this model. The activities are arranged in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust, where communication is encouraged to enable aged people to connect with each other. This interdependence is important for any peer group but especially for aged people as they are able to see ageing in the context of others.

As well as providing the opportunities for social connection, Neighbour Aids promote health education in their aged community. Prevention is an important aspect of active ageing and Neighbour Aids are a constant source of information and education for their aged clients.

Access to Services

While access to the current service system can be difficult and confusing, we raise strong concerns about the Gateway system as proposed in the Issues Paper. We agree that a single access point may be beneficial in processing and allocating referrals to providers, however it should not be the only point of access, especially for entry level services such as Social Support.

The nature of the Social Support that Neighbour Aids provide presents their services in a non-threatening atmosphere where staff and volunteers are able to build up a

relationship of trust with an aged person so that the transition to accepting the Social Support service is seamless.

It is well known that many aged people are resistant to receiving services when they are first recommended and it is only when a crisis occurs that they are receptive to the idea of service provision. For many, it is a giant step for them to ask for help and the Gateway could be seen as a barrier rather than an access point.

Our case in point is Home Care's Referral and Assessment Centre (RAC). The experience that service providers and clients have had since the establishment of the RAC has been overwhelmingly negative. The RAC acts as a gatekeeper for Home Care services and despite many "improvements" over the years, little change has been experienced.

While we agree that access and referral needs to be consistent and coherent, we have concerns that the Gateway system alone is the way to manage this. We are aware of the positive aspects of the Single Access Point project in the Hunter region and there appears to be benefits for providers and clients when a system like this works well. However, consideration needs to be given to allowing other points of entry in order to meet the diverse needs of aged people.

Social Capital

As most Neighbour Aids have a prominent presence in their community, their contribution to the social capital of their communities is important to note. The engagement of volunteers, connections to local health professionals and other service providers, the local "shop front" office which is welcoming and accessible all contribute to the social capital of their communities.

The investment of social capital in communities is one that is difficult to measure however is widely recognized as a vital element which influences social and economic development.

Cost Effective

Taking the key aspects of Social Support Services into account that have been raised in this submission, it is evident that the provision of these services to the aged community has true financial benefits. With continued funding, Neighbour Aid Social Support services can play a significant role in supporting aged people to be well educated on issues of health and well-being, healthy and active, valued, respected and fully engaged members of their community.

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the "Caring for Older Australians" draft Report and look forward to the final Issues Paper.

Yours sincerely

Helen Ivory
Chairperson