



## *N.T. Carers Association Inc.*

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Nursing Home Subsidies Inquiry  
Productivity Commission  
PO Box 80  
BELCONNEN ACT 2600

14th September, 1998

To whom it may concern,

As the co-ordinator of the Northern Region Carer Respite Centre, based in Darwin, I administer a residential respite booking service to allow carers to make bookings for respite in aged care facilities.

During the past year in which I have managed the service, I have become aware of the financial pressures on aged care facilities to keep the respite beds continually filled. If there is no one in the respite bed, the facility receives no Commonwealth subsidy for that bed on that night. While this superficially appears a reasonable situation, on a practical level the subsidy may equal the wages of one or more staff members but the work load to the facility is not reduced by one staff member because of one less resident.

As the booking service for residential respite, we do our best to ensure the beds are continually filled and we have bookings made months in advance. As a system it runs smoothly unless, as happens, respite residents are admitted to hospital or die during respite or just before the respite was due to begin or carers cancel respite at the last minute. The situation is compounded with Aboriginal residents from remote areas who may have to wait for an Air Medical Service evacuation to bring them in or take them home or may have unexpected ceremonial obligations such as a funeral to fulfil.

In these situations it usually takes several days to organise an alternate respite situation, the bed remains empty and the aged care facility does not receive a subsidy for the bed. I am sure aged



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care facilities and residential respite booking services throughout Australia experience similar difficulties and pressures.

While I do not think it is appropriate to return to the unused bed days subsidies administered through the Respite Options Program, I would like to suggest that each aged care facility be eligible to claim for a quota of unused bed days per year. This would encourage facilities to maintain respite beds and to support this respite program which makes so much difference to carers and their ability and willingness to continue caring for their loved ones.

Yours sincerely

Alison Martens  
Co-ordinator  
Northern Region Carer Respite Centre