

Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Aged Care Legislation
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Thank you for this opportunity to provide input to the Parliamentary inquiry concerning the aged care legislation. My comments are based on experience in aged care policy and research including involvement with consumer groups, providers, and implementation of health and care services at a regional level.

I wish to provide my support for this foundation legislation for aged care while congratulating your Committee for bringing it under critical scrutiny. It is significant that this legislation has widespread support, notwithstanding many specific concerns, and that consumers and the aged care industry are collaborating with Government in devising implementation including the consumer-directed approach. I note that the legislation and the Living Longer, Living Better (LLL) reforms basically follow the outstanding, independent work of the Productivity Commission's Caring for Older People inquiry. The LLL reforms, however, do not fully implement the PC recommendations. Overall, my view is that the aged care legislation would provide valuable direction along with sufficient scope for adjustment and change as determined by the Government of the day.

My views are summarised below on specific policy matters and then my area of expertise in research and evidence-based policy and practice. More information on these topics is presented in my Parliamentary Lecture on aged care and various other public statements and publications listed in the website entries below. I would be pleased to provide further information and comments to the Committee and to individual members; and to participate in any further Hearings or other discussions. I am happy with this statement being released as a public document.

Specific policy comments:

- With regard to resources, the important concept of entitlement will be difficult to attain unless adequate resources are available through a combination of private and public resources. It is disappointing that: 1) the LLL reforms commit public resources that appear to be inadequate to meet projected need and 2) the LLL reforms have not taken up carefully considered PC recommendations for mechanisms by which older people could choose to use their housing assets while remaining in their own home. In my view the implementation of such financial mechanisms is an inevitable and desirable step to address growing need.
- The LLL reforms pay important attention to the particular needs of vulnerable groups but in a constrained fiscal climate strong action is needed to ensure that the adequacy of access and provision for all groups is maintained over time. This may involve ongoing monitoring of the reforms in terms of how they reach vulnerable groups such as those without housing assets or superannuation, and those in rural areas.
- The Consumer-directed Care initiatives are essential in pointing the way towards new paradigms focused on building and maintaining capacities and enabling older people and their carers to determine support and care arrangements. The evidence to date indicates

that this new approach can be remarkably effective, and stands in sharp contrast to existing services.

- The Gateway is an important cornerstone for access to care and support and it is good to see the developments underway. However, current plans suggest that the emphasis is primarily on a telephone information service that, while useful, does not provide for face-to-face advice and coordination in the context of each of each local area.
- While the LLLB reforms refer to some coordination with mainstream health and health promotion efforts, aged care must be central to whatever regional structures are in place between the Commonwealth and the States (and indeed local government) to ensure seamless coordination of aged care with mainstream services; inclusion of older people's interests in the action of mainstream government and community services; accountability of service providers on a local basis; and (crucially) the flow of information from local implementation back to program managers and funders in Canberra.

Research and Evidence

Critical thinking and a strong evidence base are valuable investments for pursuing the public interest and cost-effectiveness of aged care and other government actions. It is worth noting that the current aged care system has been informed by an ANU Ageing and the Family project which contributed to the knowledge base underpinning the aged care reforms of the 1980s. Subsequent development and implementation of the Home and Community Care (HACC) program through the 1990s was facilitated by applied research projects and consultancies funded by Commonwealth and State governments. Further research on health and aged care is being conducted by our Centre of Excellence in Population Ageing Research (CEPAR) funded by the Australian Research Council and Partner Organisations including the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing and Treasury as well as the NSW State government.

When the draft of the Productivity Commission report was released, I made a case for investment in evaluations and data resources involving end users when developing the strategies as well as in subsequent translation (Kendig, 2011). I would comment further now:

- It is important and valuable to see that the LLLB reforms are being implemented along with strengthening the role of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the release of more operational aged care data for wider analysis. For this information to be useful it must be publically available on a timely basis in a form usable by researchers.
- Over the last decade major consultancies funded by government have yielded information potentially valuable for practice and service development, but many if not most findings have been withheld for years (if ever released). As further consultancies are developed, it will be important to have consumers and providers (as well as funders) involved in setting the objectives, interpreting findings, and distributing findings widely to inform development of the service system. A targeted, applied research program with public translation of findings would be better value than more internal consultancies.
- Linking aged care data to large surveys, such as the 45 and Up Study in NSW, provides massive opportunities to better understand the changing needs of older people and their access to and connections between hospitals, HACC, and other components of health and

care systems (as is now being demonstrated by a CEPAR study led by Professor Julie Byles from the University of Newcastle)

- The valuable Ageing Well, Ageing Productively (AWAP) research program – established in 2006 to guide policy developments in ageing. A next stage of this research program would provide a knowledge base to inform policy developments while the baby boom cohort is now entering later life, population ageing progresses, and aged care reform advances.

A bigger picture view is that knowledge can make the critical difference in achieving the Productivity Commission's recommendations for shifting aged care towards flexible, consumer-directed provision that enables independence and facilitates wellbeing. A decade lies ahead for evolving policies, services, and practise. Innovation and value would benefit greatly from ongoing, independent analyses and evidence as to the efficacy, impacts, costs, and social equity of new approaches in care and support for older people and carers.

Research can identify and understand the diverse and changing preferences, capabilities and needs of vulnerable older people and caregivers both at individual and population levels. This work would be related to current care, health and support service use including user views on their adequacy and satisfaction with them. It would take a dynamic approach, examining change over time; be comprised of qualitative as well as quantitative dimensions; and examine influences on the operations of complex local service systems. An initial emphasis on Consumer Directed Care packages, in community and then residential settings, would inform developments at the forefront of innovations and new directions.

In conclusion, research can yield value to policymakers, program and service managers, and practitioners as well as the broader public in shaping expectations and exercising consumer rights. A research program should be developed in collaboration with consumer and provider Partners who would collaborate in as translating findings to ongoing improvement in service development and delivery. Research findings can reshape expectations and improve performance in Australia's responsiveness to individual and population ageing. They can make an expert, independent, and evidence-based contribution centred on the interests of vulnerable older people and carers.

For further information please see:

1. A lecture given by me to the Parliamentary library on 22nd August 2012 – in which I discuss the current and historical context of aged care in Australia, outline the current government's agenda for aged care, and discuss recommendations from the Productivity Commission. Powerpoint slides are available from:
http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/Vis/vis1213
2. An editorial I wrote for the *Australasian Journal of Ageing*, in which I summarise and critique the *Productivity Commission Review of Care for Older People* (2011). Available from
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1741-6612.2011.00549.x/abstract>
3. Articles written for *The Conversation* on the Productivity Commission's report
 - a. <http://theconversation.com/what-the-caring-for-older-australians-report-means-for-the-future-of-aged-care-2773>
 - b. <http://theconversation.com/ask-the-elderly-what-they-need-not-the-care-industry-3380>

4. An ABC Radio National Interview with myself and the Minister for Ageing Mark Butler. Available from <http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2012/s3495521.htm?site=sydney>
5. An article in which I comment on the NSW Government Ageing Strategy, released in July 2012. Available from <http://www.australianageingagenda.com.au/2012/07/10/article/NSW-embraces-its-ageing-population/JLNLCOALO>