

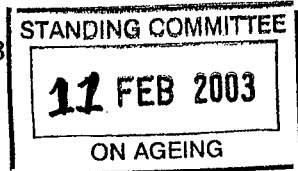
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
ASSOCIATION
OF QUEENSLAND INC.

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11 February 2003



Dr Margot Kerley
Secretary
House of Representatives - Standing Committee on Ageing
Parliament House
CANBERRA QLD 2600

Dear Dr Kerley

Long Term Strategies to Address the Ageing of the Australian Population over the Next 40 Years.

The Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) welcomes the Federal Government's enquiry into the issues impacting upon Australia as a result of the ageing of the population. The ageing of the population, particularly combined with the shift in demographic, is an issue of concern for Queensland Local Government.

The LGAQ policy statement makes it very clear that we understand the issues affecting the ageing to be primarily a State Government responsibility, however Local Government has a coordination, facilitation and advocacy role to play to ensure aged issues are adequately addressed.

Please find following a list of the concerns that the LGAQ would like to see the Parliamentary Committee consider on behalf of Queensland Local Government.

1. Cost shifting and the Aged

Local Government in Queensland is responsive to Community needs in a local setting. With respect to issues arising from the proportion of older people in the community, it is unlikely that there will be a uniform response across the 125 Councils in Queensland.

Issues thought to be relevant to Local Government responses include:

- a. Pensioner Rates remissions, rates assistance arrangements and special discounts for dog registrations, bus fares, entrance to Council facilities etc
- b. Aged Housing (directly and indirectly)
- c. Community or social services (HACC, Senior Citizens Centres)
- d. Health and medical services

The fact that the proportion of older people in our communities is increasing will have its affect on the use of services and programs provided by Local Government. We are in an era of extreme pressure on the capacity of communities to fund basic Council services and operations, with decreasing (in real terms) revenues from other levels of government.



2. Pensioner Rates Remissions and rates assistance arrangements and Local Government Revenue

The Queensland State Government provides a subsidy for pensioner rates remission. This subsidy would be universally applied across Queensland Local Government, as it is a scheme which provides up to \$180 subsidy for rates and charges payable by pensioners with respect to their principal place of residence. Councils may have their own pensioner rates assistance arrangements, and if they do, the scheme will usually "piggy back" or be aligned with the criteria for eligibility for the State subsidy.

Councils administer the State Pensioner Subsidy scheme at a local level, managing the application and approval process, and claiming subsidy allowed to eligible pensioners. This scheme has been in place for over a decade, and while systems have been streamlined, there are administration costs associated with the scheme borne by local governments.

Rates assistance for (mainly) pensioners can also be provided through arrangements to defer debt recovery until ownership of the property passes to the owner's estate. This could have an impact on Council's cash flows and involve more intensive administration of the rating activity for those properties.

In addition pensioner discounts for dog registrations, swimming pool entrance fees, bus fares and the like are common in the majority of Local Governments in Queensland. This assistance has been factored into the operations of Councils over many decades and reflect similar assistance provided by other levels of government and private enterprise.

The obvious result of an increase in the number of people in this category increasing, coupled with a decrease in the group who pay full rates and charges, is a drop in revenue. As well, there continues to be considerable pressure on Local Government, from State and Federal Government and the community, to extend these discounts to other groups within the community.

Local Government tries to accommodate this as much as possible by providing support to a wide range of individuals and community organisations, however the capacity to extend this is limited.

3. Aged Housing and Affordable Housing options for the aged

Many Councils directly provide Aged accommodation/housing for pensioners in their communities. This can be as an accident of history - Pensioner Units taken over by Council from an expiring Community organisation in the 50's, or as a deliberate decision by Council to help retain members of the community in the town.

Generally, the State Government has provided the majority of the Capital cost of constructing such accommodation. Councils typically contribute at least 10% of required funds plus the land and services to the land.

The ongoing operation and maintenance costs are borne by the Council, funded by rental income from pensioner tenants. Anecdotal evidence is that full cost recovery from rentals is not always achieved, and that Council's general fund supports this activity. Indirectly, Councils are often requested to assist community organisations with a social welfare/aged care charitable focus. Meals on Wheels rate remissions, and grants to Senior Citizens centre programs are commonplace.



The well documented lack of affordable housing options in some parts of the state is a high level concern for the LGAQ. This issue impacts heavily upon the aged, particularly in regional and remote parts of the state where the population is ageing is above the state average. In these areas the Local Council may have taken on the role of housing provider and manager. This presents a considerable challenge to smaller councils who are very often not adequately resourced to provide this service and do not have access to support networks in the local area.

4. Community or social services (HACC, Senior Citizens Centres)

In Queensland, some Councils have taken on the role of co-ordination of the Home And Community Care scheme, although most such schemes would usually be managed by a community organisation. Again, anecdotal evidence is that since the program's inception, the amount of grant funds has gradually (and increasingly) fallen short of the actual costs of the scheme. Councils operating HACC schemes directly are forced to make up the difference from general revenue, and where community organisations are involved, it would be common for the local council to provide some assistance.

Senior Citizens Centres are also provided and resourced by Councils in Queensland to varying extents. One model is for the Council to provide and maintain the building, while a Committee manages activities. Other models see the Council providing resources for the programs as well.

5. Health and medical services

Many Councils in Queensland provide immunisation services, usually directed at children immunisation against common childhood diseases. However, the service is available free to all age groups for ADT (adult diphtheria and tetanus) at least, and possibly other vaccinations.

In rural and remote areas, there are instances of Councils purchasing medical centres to ensure that basic medical services are provided to their communities, especially aged and young people who might not have transport options available to travel for basic medical services.

The Association would appreciate being kept informed of the Parliamentary Committee's progress and request that we be placed on your database.



The Association's contact on this matter is Desley Renton, Social Policy Advisor on 30002216 or (desley_renton@lgaq.asn.au).

I hope that this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

Greg Hoffman PSM
DIRECTOR
POLICY AND REPRESENTATION

dgr:rc