

OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC ADVOCATE



29 July 2004

The Secretary
Senate Community Affairs References Committee
Suite S1 59
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submission to Senate Inquiry into Aged Care

Terms of Reference of the Inquiry

CJ The appropriateness of young people with disabilities being accommodated in residential aged care facilities and the extent to which residents with special needs, such as dementia, mental illness of specific conditions are met under current funding arrangements.

The Office of the Public Advocate, South Australia, is legal guardian for a number of persons whom we believe are placed inappropriately in aged care facilities. The reason is that there are no other options for persons who are young and whose ability to care for themselves is compromised by intellectual, physical or sensory impairment often induced by an acquired brain injury.

A case in point is that of a young man aged 25 who was placed in Hammill House, the nursing home section of Port Pirie Hospital, early in 2002 for respite and has remained there ever since. This young man has an intellectual disability and suffers from epilepsy and diabetes as a result of foetal alcohol syndrome. All service providers agree that nursing home placement is totally inappropriate for a man of this age. He awaits placement in an Options supported community house in Port Augusta.

A second case is that of a 57 year old woman who suffered a brain aneurysm at age 51 with resultant brain damage. For the first five years her husband cared for her. When this became too difficult she was placed in a nursing home and has remained there for the last two years. The placement is inappropriate both for the woman herself and for the elderly residents whose safety is compromised by her aggressive behaviour.

Upon being made aware of this situation, our office undertook advocacy both at the individual level and at a systems level. The Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing here in Adelaide provided some basic statistics for South Australia and are looking at more detailed data. However, even the basic statistics show that with regard to permanent residential placements there are 241 persons aged under 60 [69 of these are aged under 50] living in nursing homes in South Australia.

As well as being inappropriate for the persons involved it also means that there are fewer beds available for elderly people awaiting a nursing home placement. Often these people remain in hospital for lengthy periods purely because there is nowhere to place them.

The solution is a massive injection of funds in order to provide appropriate placement for younger persons who require a high level of care for whatever reason. At present their quality of life is being compromised by an inappropriate living situation.

In our role as guardian, often with jurisdiction over accommodation, this compromise is only too evident when we work with informal and formal support networks to identify the best placement for a 'protected person'.

I thank you for the opportunity to make this submission and look forward to a renewed commitment by government to resolving this situation.

JOHN HARLEY

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