

Senator ALLISON (Victoria—Leader of the Australian Democrats) (10.39 a.m.)—I rise to talk about the report of the Senate Community Affairs References Committee entitled *Quality and equity in aged care*. During this inquiry we heard from many groups and individuals, and the report tabled today covers many of the issues that were raised by those groups. I thank everyone who put in so much time and effort to make submissions to the inquiry and to appear before us. All of the issues raised are important and probably deserve speeches in their own right; however, in the short time I have today I will focus on an issue that the Democrats have been heavily involved in bringing to the attention of the parliament and the public—that is, young people in nursing homes.

We fought strongly to have the plight of young people with disabilities who are currently accommodated in residential aged care included in the terms of reference for the inquiry. Every day a young person with high or complex care needs is placed in an aged care facility somewhere in Australia because the accommodation they need does not exist. Some of these individuals are younger than 10 years of age. At the current rate of entry, there will be over 10,000 young people residing in residential aged care facilities by 2007.

Despite a concerted effort over the last few years by many dedicated people, there has been little change in the situation faced by more than 6,300 young Australians with a variety of disabilities who currently live in aged care nursing homes throughout Australia. Although there was a national summit on young people in nursing homes in 2002 and a national conference in 2003, both of which have drawn national attention to this situation, there are still squabbles between the state and federal governments about making the changes needed to provide the sort of community based accommodation and support services that these young people deserve.

This inquiry heard from many of these young people, their families and their carers, and from groups who have taken to their hearts the cry of these young people that something needs to be done. Almost half of the 240 submissions to the inquiry focused solely on the needs of young people in this situation and many more included detailed comments on the issue. These submissions not only focused on young Australians who are already living in residential aged care because there are no alternatives but also drew attention to the many thousands more across Australia who are at risk of placement in residential aged care—that is, they are still, in almost every circumstance, living at home. Those young people are cared for by family members who are struggling with limited support, and it will take very little to tip those young people into aged care facilities, which in most cases they try very hard to avoid. Whether currently in an aged care facility or at risk of going into one, those young people all have one thing in common: a desire to live in accommodation of their choice with the rehabilitation and support they need to have lives worth living and futures worth having.

This inquiry heard about the many factors that contribute to young people with disabilities ending up in this situation and the actions that need to be taken. We heard about the need for reform of the personal injury insurance

arrangements—something the Democrats have often called for. We heard about failings in the aged care and disability acts and the way in which the Commonwealth-state disability agreement allows young people with catastrophic injuries or degenerative disorders that require high levels of care to fall between the cracks. We heard about poor assessment processes and lack of flexibility but, most of all, we heard about the territorial disputes.

I thank members of the committee for the agreement they reached that this is no longer an acceptable response to this longstanding problem. It is not good enough to simply point the finger and say that this is someone else's problem. It is time that all levels of government and all sectors came together to find achievable and sustainable solutions. It is a human rights issue as much as anything else. I endorse the focus that this report has on the need for a cooperative and urgent response. We recognise that there is some good work happening at both the state and federal levels and we saw some very good examples of what can be done. But much more needs to be done, and done quickly. That is why in this report we have said that no more young people should be moved into residential aged care facilities because of a lack of options. I seek leave to continue my remarks later.