

Senator KNOWLES (Western Australia) (10.26 a.m.)—I will speak briefly on this report of the Community Affairs References Committee. Aged care is always going to be a controversial issue. I want to place on record as a member of the government my commendation for what the government has done to dramatically increase funding for this vital sector. As Senator McLucas has just said, the most controversial issue raised in this inquiry was that of young people in nursing homes. The fact that the states have ignored their responsibilities according to the Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement is nothing short of a disgrace and I certainly hope that they lift their game on this vital issue. I acknowledge that the Prime Minister has put this important matter before COAG and I hope that this very serious area of public policy will be addressed in a much more positive way.

I too am delighted that this is a unanimous report. It is quite unusual. I mentioned in my valedictory speech yesterday how unusual unanimous reports are. I commend Senator Marshall on his chairmanship of this committee and all of my colleagues, because we all had to give and take. That has resulted in a very good and positive report that is very clearly directed. I also wish to place on record my thanks to my personal staff member who helped Senator Humphries and me deal with this very complex issue and meet very short deadlines. I do not normally have someone working as closely with me on a report as I did on this occasion but it has been invaluable. I wish to hand over to Senator Humphries for the reason I mentioned with regard to the report of the committee on cancer. In closing, as a longstanding member of the Community Affairs References Committee I wish the committee the very best for all of their future endeavours. This is a very important area of social policy and I wish you all well.