

Media Release

Sunday 6 March, 2005



Do we need so many nursing homes?

Aged and Community Services Australia (ACSA) is urging Australians to debate the future of our aged care service system, with the release of its discussion paper outlining a framework for the future care and support of older people.

Most public aged care resources in Australia are devoted to long term residential care. Aged care homes are being pushed by financial imperatives into becoming larger and larger yet it is not clear whether this is what people want. As the older population grows larger it will become even more diverse in its needs and preferences, presenting a challenge to our accepted ways of doing things.

“We must be clear about our objectives, honest about the shortcomings in the current system and firm in our resolve to improve the system of care for older people,” ACSA CEO Greg Mundy said while launching the paper at the Tri- State aged care conference at Mt Gambier on 6 March.

The paper points out that 90% of people receiving care are pensioners and can't afford to pay more for care. The diversity of aged care needs- ranging from indigenous communities in remote areas, to people generally in the bush, people from non English speaking backgrounds, people ageing with a disability, and the growing numbers of people with mental illness, especially depression and dementia - mean that flexibility and choice are becoming more not less important. Meanwhile the tax base for paying for care is declining and access and equity in obtaining aged and community care are coming under threat.

“We face big challenges as providers, to operate in a system which is underfunded, over regulated, uncoordinated with other services, predominantly institutionalised, and chronically short staffed,” Greg Mundy said.

“While demand for the traditional institutional care we provide may drop, in relative terms, it is likely to be replaced by increased demand for rehabilitation, palliative care and community care or care at home.”

“We are placing these issues squarely on the table, and call on everyone concerned about and responsible for, aged and community care funding, services and those who use care, to encourage and join in a public debate, so we can provide **a system of care which enables people who need support, and their carers, to live optimally in the home and community of their choice.**”

“The conference will be opened by the Federal Minister for Ageing, Julie Bishop, who has been sent a copy of the Discussion Paper. Our concerns are in line with the keynote speaker, Dr Bill Thomas, the American expert who will describe the Eden Alternative forms of residential care which focus on the individual and provided smaller, community based ‘Green House’ residential aged care as a choice.” Greg Mundy concluded.

ACSA represents over 1,200 church, charitable and community-based organisations providing housing, supported accommodation and community care services to around half a million older Australians. *The Framework for Aged And Community Services in Australia can be downloaded from www.agedcare.org.au under 'What's New'.*

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