

# POSITION STATEMENT 2013



## SUPPORTING THE WELL-BEING OF OLDER PEOPLE FOR A DECENT LIFE

### What Australia needs

Let's build a society in which our older people can access support when they need it, and can choose from a range of sustainable aged care services, and in which older people can participate in the community and work-force without discrimination and barriers. Let's develop sustainable social services that can effectively respond to the needs of households, families and communities.

### Why it matters

We now have a roadmap from the Productivity Commission on how we as a nation can support older people, both now and into the future. The current government has taken significant steps to implement change with the passage of the Living Longer, Living Better aged care Bills through the Parliament. This needs to continue and be supported in its implementation.

Services in the UnitingCare network manage 14 percent of all residential aged care places in Australia, with more than 26,000 aged care beds nationally. UnitingCare also provides 21 percent of community care. Our services operate in every state and territory in remote, regional and urban Australia. Our aged care network is part of the broader UnitingCare network of social services which provide services across 1,500 sites to more than 2 million people each year. This broad network employs 35,000 staff, supported by 24,000 volunteers, who work with children, young people and families, people with disabilities, and older Australians.

Australia's growing ageing population is engaged and informed. Regardless of frailty or disability, all quite rightly expect that they will have access to the services that will allow them to maintain their health, their autonomy and their dignity. It makes good social and economic sense to invest heavily in the wellbeing of older people to allow them to remain healthy, active members of their local communities. We must continue to combat ageist attitudes and remove all forms of discrimination based on age in employment and in the wider community.

Central to reform is a dynamic, appropriately qualified work force and the funding to deliver all levels of care in a variety of settings.

Investment is needed along the whole continuum of care, not just at the end stages of life when people are so disabled, often by preventable problems, that they have no options other than residential care. Early intervention and restorative approaches can limit the impact of many chronic and debilitating conditions and decrease the number of Australians needing to access residential aged care.



Preventable problems such as falls and the impact of loneliness and isolation can lead to premature admission to residential care. Access to appropriate housing and support, and strengthening communities to promote access and participation, are sustainable methods to prevent these basic problems.

## What Government can do

Implement Productivity Commission recommendations, specifically:

- Universal access based on need;
- Future opportunities for choice and freeing up revenue streams to enable people to have those choices, such as through a home equity release scheme;
- Separation of accommodation and care, enabling funding to follow the person; and
- Enhancement of the Gateway service to ensure older people have information and access to support through a local contact point and a person-centred, restorative focus.

Focus on the health and well-being of older people through promotion of restorative approaches. We need to ensure good coordination across the health and aged care systems, with the ability to use funding flexibly to promote early intervention and appropriate care. A stronger emphasis and investment in community capacity building is required, to support the community in the integration of older people.

Continue the important initiatives of the Age Discrimination Commissioner to promote positive attitudes to ageing and to prevent age discrimination in the community and employment.

Ensure affordable housing for older people with limited means, encourage universal design, and create housing and communities that are age-friendly.

Ensure access to relevant support for people with limited means or other special needs (including dementia):

- Monitor the impact of increased fees for those on moderate incomes (part pensioners);
- Ensure an affordable supply of support services in areas of market failure (such as rural and remote areas and for Indigenous and homeless people); and,
- Ensure that appropriate resourcing is available for people with dementia and those at the end stages of their lives.

Support sector sustainability:

- Conduct a comprehensive cost of care study as a priority;
- Reduce red tape and regulation, particularly around the implementation of *Living Longer, Living Better*;
- Ensure sustainable funding and indexation; and,
- Implement better pay and conditions for the whole aged care service delivery workforce that are fully funded.

Support effective governance of the sector by means of:

- The Aged Care Financing Authority, the Pricing Commissioner and the Quality Agency retaining an objective and independent role in ensuring high quality affordable and sustainable aged care services; and,
- Provide security for residents accommodation payments and a fair structure for providers through changes to the Levy on Accommodation Payments (Bonds) and better due diligence on new providers.