



Dr Sarah Palmer  
Principal Research Officer  
Community Development and Justice Standing Committee  
Legislative Assembly Committee Office  
Level 1/ 11 Harvest Terrace  
WEST PERTH WA 6005

12<sup>th</sup> June 2014

Dear Dr Palmer

## **INQUIRY INTO POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF AN AGEING COMMUNITY**

We welcome the opportunity to provide feedback on the Department for Communities' *Age Friendly WA: The Seniors Strategic Planning Framework 2012-2017*.

### **Background to Baptistcare:**

Baptistcare is a multimillion dollar service provider operating in Western Australia. We provide direct services, especially residential care services to thousands of older Australians annually. We employ around 1600 people across Western Australia and provide services to thousands of Western Australians and their families. We operate in regional, rural and metropolitan Perth.

Baptistcare is driven by its values: dignity and compassion; integrity and respect; courage and justice, stewardship and accountability. These essential human values determine the way we do business, the way we treat each other and the way we work with our clients, our peers and our colleagues.

### **The Inquiry**

The Department for Communities Seniors Strategic Planning Framework 2012-2017 provides a basis for developing a society which supports and assists the aged in our community. While much is focused on the well-aged, there are some initiatives which focus on the frail aged and seniors who may need additional help and resources. This submission identifies areas of concern at both the macro and specific level. It also considers regional differences.

### **Impact of Changing Federal Funding Landscape**

It is not yet clear what impact announced Federal funding changes will have on services, facilities and programs relevant to older Western Australians. It may be that this review is premature in the absence of a detailed analysis of those implications.

## Summary of Progress to Date

The Seniors Strategic Planning Framework 2012-2017 identifies a range of strategies to be undertaken in order to implement the planning framework and achieve the broad objectives. Without a detailed assessment of progress to date against each major activity, commenting on the relevance of the plan is difficult.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **The Department of Communities produce two documents in the next three months:**
  - a) **A quantified summary of the impact of federal budget cuts on older Western Australians and related programs; and**
  - b) **A quantifiable summary of the progress made to date against the specific activities identified in the strategic framework to enable an easily digestible review of the relevance of the framework and its success.**

## SUBMISSION DETAIL

### Housing:

WA Tomorrow<sup>1</sup> (January 2012) paints a thumbnail sketch of ageing communities across the state, with the possible exception of the Gascoyne area. With much of the identified population growth being in the older age groups, from aged 65 on, and as would be expected with the baby boomers moving through the generations, growth in this sector up to and including 2026 will see the need for significant changes in the way we do business as a state, in communities and as families.

With an average of 2.6 persons per household, older people are more likely to live with a spouse only or alone.<sup>2</sup> This has implications for housing provision across the state. In the context of developing a wider range of affordable housing, government has freed up the regulations around residency in ancillary accommodation (granny flats) to enable such accommodation to be used by non related people and, indeed, to be part of the general rental market. Perhaps one unintended consequence of this is that seniors may no longer be welcome in granny flats, as the property owner seeks additional income which might accrue through renting out the ancillary accommodation (estimated at around \$250.00 per week).

The Affordable Housing Strategy 2010-2020 relies heavily on continuation of the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS). It is noted that the recently announced Federal budget has cancelled this program, with no indication that it will be reconsidered. This will impact significantly on the targets for affordable housing and hence access to affordable housing for seniors. This is particularly important in the context of access to suitable and affordable accommodation for seniors in the rental market. The recent Anglicare Rental Affordability Snapshot<sup>3</sup> found a grand total of six premises which were affordable and appropriate by pensioners within the metropolitan area and a further 19 in the south west and great southern regions. The implications of the Federal Government's withdrawal from this program are serious for all Western Australians and particularly for those older Western Australians on fixed incomes. Baptist Care Australia nationally is particularly concerned

---

<sup>1</sup> **Western Australia Tomorrow**, Population Report No. 7, 2006 to 2026 Forecast Summary Planning Regions of WA Department of Planning 2012

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics **1379.0.55.001 National Regional Profile, Western Australia, 2007-2011**

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.anglicarewa.org.au/theme/anglicarewaorgau/assets/public/File/Rental%20Affordability%20Snapshot/WA%20Mini%20Report.pdf> (May 2014)

about the impact on Social Housing needs for those most economically vulnerable and marginalised in our society.

### **Seniors Cards and Benefits**

The Seniors Card plays an important role in contributing to the quality of life for older Australians. The Seniors Strategic Planning Framework 2012-2017 make frequent mention of its value, expansion plans and its importance to the community. The reduction in federal government allocation for seniors funding announced in the May 2014 budget has ramifications for this. It has been suggested that much of these benefits will be removed or curtailed.<sup>4</sup> Whether this is the case or not, the implications for Seniors, especially those on fixed incomes who own their own home are serious.

### **Dementia**

Alzheimers and Dementia are the most serious risks for the frail aged in our community. Alzheimer's Australia reports that there are more than 29,000 people with Alzheimers in Western Australia alone. Predicted to rise by 350% by 2050<sup>5</sup>, this exponential growth needs to be managed and planned for now. With three in ten people over the age of 85 and almost one in ten people over 65 diagnosed with dementia, the sheer numbers of people suffering from dementia, as the baby boomers age and the 'bulge' moves beyond the 60's age group into the very old age range is staggering. While in 2011 there were an estimated 34,600 people over the age of 85 in Western Australia, by 2019 this will be in the region of 150,000. The impact on the provision of secure and appropriate accommodation needs to be planned for now. Constructing sufficient and appropriate accommodation for such a growth is unlikely to occur, therefore, making our communities Dementia-friendly is an imperative. Public transport, lost independence due to no longer driving and the appropriateness of community resources for care are all concerns for those living with dementia and their carers.

Pilots to develop dementia-friendly communities in Port Macquarie and Kiama, auspiced by Alzheimer's Australia, all point to examples of ways to make our communities more dementia friendly. This includes a significant community education program, especially amongst young people who may experience their grandparents' loss of cognition as something alien and frightening. The introduction of a similar program across Western Australia, especially for rural and regional communities where the options are so much fewer, is an important first step which should begin without delay.

The statement in the planning framework that:

*The Department for Communities assisted 27 local governments round the state to adopt the World Health Organisation's 'Age friendly Community' approach to planning for an ageing population – meaning that nearly a third of Western Australian seniors reside in an age friendly community*<sup>6</sup>

is somewhat naïve.

Participation in a workshop, possibly preparing a document and actually implementing change on the ground are very different beasts. A review of those local governments involved in the workshop indicate that very few, and possibly only one (City of Melville) has made any serious steps towards becoming an age friendly community, let alone a dementia friendly community.

It is also important to note the recent statement by the Minister for Ageing Senator Mitch Fifield in the Senate Budget Estimates, foreshadowing a likely curtailment of the funding to

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/regional/south-west/a/23632225/cuts-hit-wa-pensioners/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.alzheimer.ie/Get-Involved/Dementia-Friendly-Communities.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> Seniors Strategic Planning Framework 2012 – 2020 p 18

support the increasing number of claims by service providers working with people with dementia. This will have a major and deleterious impact on the capacity for providers to work with clinicians in diagnosing and providing timely and appropriate support to the significantly increasing numbers of people suffering from dementia in residential and community aged care service. It has implications for plans to increase the capacity of service provision in aged care which may not be able to afford to provide the specialist services that are required, and economically it impacts on the acute healthcare system, as families, individuals seeking diagnosis and those providers who will need to confirm the clinical diagnosis for the individual to ensure appropriate care.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

- 2. The creation of Dementia Friendly communities in regional and rural Western Australia, as a first priority be funded by the State Government in partnership with other stakeholders.**
- 3. Develop and implement a plan for construction of at least an additional 2,000 beds high care facilities for dementia clients in the metropolitan area, in partnership with relevant stakeholders.**
- 4. The commitment to funding the diagnosis through the State health care system and appropriate funding levels for dementia care from the Department of Social Services.**

#### **Respite**

With the increasing demands on residential aged care and significantly greater reliance on community support, especially home care and family carers, the need for adequate and accessible respite care is reaching critical point. It is already extremely hard to find respite care within Western Australia, and this will only grow more difficult as the numbers of people who are cared for at home increases. This represents a significant policy shift, with the need for additional beds being made available for respite, with the accompanying support packages.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

- 5. Detailed work be undertaken to identify and fund the growth needs for adequate respite care around the state, including in rural and regional areas.**

#### **Skills Development**

Recent analysis has indicated that Australia will have a shortage of 109,000 nurses by 2025.<sup>7</sup> On the basis of an 11% ratio for Western Australia, that's around 12,000 nurses we won't have to work in our hospitals, communities, residential aged care facilities and in-home services.

The potential impact of the federal government's proposal to deregulate university fees, coupled with increased HELP fees for students, in an industry predominantly occupied by women who have regular breaks in their working life when having families is likely to raise a further barrier to adding to our nursing workforce. Analysis posits an increase in the cost of a nursing degree rising from around \$20,000 to \$38,000 and interest accruing on that 'loan' meaning the ultimate debt repayment, over 22 years, will be around \$66,000. While the Federal budget has proposed a three year scholarship program to support 500 nurses through training (on the basis of a period on graduation where the recipient works in regional

---

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.hwa.gov.au/sites/default/files/SummaryHW2025Vol1-3FINAL.pdf>

and rural Australia) the fifty or so that might be in Western Australia will not touch the sides of the foreshadowed shortage.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

- 6. State Government invest significant efforts in developing a range of mechanisms to expand the nursing workforce in Western Australia, through such measures as encouraging skilled migration, developing a range of training and development programs, funding nurse training through TAFE and university and developing partnerships with the private health sector, and not for profits to develop innovative training programs for Enrolled Nurses as well as registered Nurses.**

### **Older people in the Workforce**

The acceptance by employers of more flexible working conditions is an essential component of encouraging older people to remain in or return to the workforce. For example, a working life of around 3-4 days a week, commencing at 10.00 am and concluding at 2.00 pm would enable an older person to use their senior's card for public transport, miss the peak hour rush and participate in the workforce and all the positive outcomes for both employers and the person concerned inherent in such participation. The major sticking point in our system is the need to change employer expectations about what constitutes working hours.

### **Rural and Regional Support – Ageing in the Bush**

Strategies relevant to the highly urbanised metropolitan area and larger regional centres may not be viable in their current format in smaller rural communities. Based on the premise that ageing place is preferable to relocation to find services, while this is recognised in the statement around continuing to improve access to health housing and transport services, (p14) particularly in regional areas, it is unclear whether regional means rural in this context.

The work currently being undertaken by Verso consulting on the Southern Inland Health Initiative (SIHI) looking at all regions as they look to transition out of aged care, the State Wide Ageing in the Bush project aims to develop a holistic regional solution to assist ageing residents to remain in their communities for as long as possible.

Recommendations from the research need to be funded and councils embarking on aged friendly communities, especially in regional and remote need support with funding (perhaps from royalties for regions). One consideration is that not all housing needs to be supported but different options need to be available for aged persons retiring from farms and stations who may not qualify for supported rent but there may not be anything else available.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

- 7. Funding be allocated to support the implementation of recommendations arising from the SIHI research.**

## Spiritual Wellbeing

From our perspective of a faith based organisation we are of the view that the strategy fails to address spiritual well-being, recognised by a broad range of mainstream and religious researchers and writers across sectors as an essential component of human wellbeing, regardless of age, religion or culture. In partnership with our colleagues and through Baptist Care Australia, our national peak body, we have recently been engaged in the development of a definition of spiritual well being. While the work is not yet finalised, our working definition is as follows:-

*Spiritual well-being is an indication of personal integration, meaning, purpose and peace; and of the life giving relationship with others, culture, the arts, the environment and God, or a power greater than oneself.*

In this context, we believe it is important that the strategic framework acknowledge, address and support spiritual wellbeing. While it may be implied through much of the dialogue, particularly through the vision statement *That all Western Australians age well in communities where they matter, belong and contribute* incorporating the internal well-being as a key outcome will ensure that the more qualitative components of well-being are also highlighted.

## RECOMMENDATION

- 8. The Strategy be amended to incorporate the elements of spiritual well-being identified as an essential component to overall well-being.**

## CONCLUSION

While the Department for Communities Senior Strategic Planning Framework 2012 – 2017 is a forward looking document which sets out an aspirational approach to building an age friendly community, it does rely on the provision of federal government funding for continuity of programs Western Australia's ageing population. Enabling older people to remain in their own homes and in their own communities is one of the major building blocks of the document. The majority of the support mechanisms to enable seniors to remain in their own homes rely on external funding. In the current economic climate, this places an unacceptable level of uncertainty on the ability of the framework and the stakeholders involved, to deliver on the strategies identified.

Infrastructure development is a major component of the strategy, whether it is effective and efficient public transport, access to residential aged care facilities or trained and competent health care workers.

A matrix which identifies progress to date , with further milestones identified for future actions will assist both government and community to set a path to achieving the objective of the framework.

Yours sincerely



**Rev'd Dr Lucy Morris**  
**Chief Executive Officer**