



Aged Care Reform – Older people send clear messages

Older Victorians want to see a simplified aged care system. They want consistent, high quality care for everyone regardless of financial position of individuals. And they believe that dignity, respect and choice should drive the system.

These are the views of senior Victorians and they were presented at COTA Victoria's forum on the proposed directions for Aged Care Reforms. At the forum Jo Root, National Policy Manager, gave an overview of COTA's response to the Productivity Commission report – what's good, and what's not so good. Anne Muldowney, Policy Adviser from Carers Victoria presented on the issues for carers in the Report.

COTA Victoria has been running workshops and focus groups on the proposed changes. Sessions have been held across the State during March and April, with over two hundred older Victorians participating. Spirited discussion in small groups, questioning each other and writing suggestions provided input to COTA on many of the issues.

Most people gave strong, in principle, support to many of the Productivity Commission recommendations. They have major concerns about the application of those principles.

The vast majority of participants say NO WAY to two-bed rooms – no one should be compelled to share a bedroom room with a stranger. Most people believe that everyone should be entitled to their own room with en-suite facilities and privacy. Others would be prepared to share an en-suite with one other person, if they had the choice.

Many people called for the Commission to increase the proposed \$98,000 asset limit for government support of accommodation costs in residential care. They believe this amount is much too low. What will happen to people with assets between the \$98,000 and the minimum price (bond) for accommodation? They also strongly believe that the homes of partners and dependents of residents must be protected.

Means tested co-contributions to care costs are seen as fair if the costs do not 'blow out'. People who have led frugal lives do not want to pay high fees for extravagant or inefficient services.

People agree that the present system is too hard to work out. Making access to information, entitlements and services easier is heartily welcomed.

People fear that a move towards a market-driven system will increase inequity. Disadvantaged people on low incomes and those with complex needs may become even more vulnerable. People have told us that aged care should not be treated as another money making industry.

Older Victorians told COTA that they want to maintain contact with family and friends. They want support to do the things they love. These contacts and activities are the lifeblood for a decent life. People are concerned that these items will be seen as nice-to-have rather than "a must-have".

People say that increased government scrutiny and investment in well trained, well paid staff with time to engage with residents will be essential to achieve the quality of life they expect.

COTA continues to work with the Productivity Commission, other organisations that work with older people, and the Government. And we will continue to discuss the issues and future directions with older people, to campaign for fairer and equitable reforms.