

AGED CARE REFORM IN AUSTRALIA

This document is a dot point summary of the conversation between the Federal Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, the Hon Mark Butler and COTA Seniors Conference participants on 29 September 2011 Jaspers Hotel Elizabeth St, Melbourne on the Productivity Commission's Report *Caring for Older Australians*
<http://www.pc.gov.au/projects/inquiry/aged-care>

QUESTION: A bouquet to you for openness and willingness to have a conversation about this.

MARK BUTLER: The Gillard government reiterates its commitment to this issue and the 5-10 year transition that will be necessary to see through changes to Australia's Aged Care system. Our government will continue to make this argument to the House.

QUESTION: What about the Poverty of older women in the new packages? Women who have faced marriage breakdown, eating out of cans, homeless, living in the backs of cars. What can you do to have our voice heard?

MB: This is an appalling situation. Older women are the fastest growing group of homeless. Recent AHURI research says that by 2050 only 29% of the population will own their own home. And will never pay off their mortgage. Frightening numbers. This is a very difficult social circumstance.

The link below takes you to AHURI The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) is a national, not-for-profit organisation that funds, conducts and disseminates high quality research on: housing; homelessness; cities to inform the policies and practices of governments, industry and the community sector, and to stimulate debate in the broader Australian community.

http://www.ahuri.edu.au/calendar/seminar_20110920.html

Q: In light of increasing age of retirement and pension age, are there proposed changes to legislation to reflect that of worker's compensation and incentives to employers?

MB: EPSA (Advisory panel on the Economic potential of Senior Australians). In its recommendations, people over 65 are staying economically active. There is provision for training and learning development. Workforce participation and the Aged Discrimination Commissioner who will focus on this work force question.

Q: 2012 Budget for Aged Care: how will it impact the proposed Aged Care reforms?

MB: this will be a tough budget. There are the natural disasters Australia has faced in the past year and the negative economic impact of Europe. The PM is committed to

action Aged Care Reform in her term of government. However, there is no commitment to \$\$\$ in 2012 budget. No decision yet; it is an open question. Our government has a track record for getting through tough legislation. 195 bills have gone through to date. Reform is too sensitive and controversial to go through a 50 + 1 lower house. The issue needs mature debate; it is not a political football.

Q: Mental and emotional well being, obesity and making community connections locally and sense of community, healthy ageing and a focus on community connections. What is being done in these areas?

MB: EPSA older Australians are a growing market e.g. they don't want Westfields (malls) but want a High street market place. Businesses will have to respond to large consumer market. This will drive more local community focus and interactions. Marketing vs lobbying power of the ageing population.

Q: What are your comments on the expected increase use of web for seniors? Everything is online nowadays. How does this work for those whom this is not possible or desirable?

MB: can't answer this in legal terms. But there are opportunities for community connections.

There is a balance between writing off older people but ensuring access. The 65-74 year old age bracket is the fastest growing internet users but I recognise that it is hard for some people. There is a need for training, broadband kiosks etc. Any change to status quo has to ensure places and access for older people.

Q: Dental Care and chronic oral health disease management?

MB: Under Keating there was more Dental under Medicare. This was squashed by Howard government.

We need a broader and better targeted approach. For example, in teen dental stats, there is a huge spike in tooth decay and this got through the house.

It is a competitive field for the 2012 budget: dental, disability, aged care, and mental health. It is hard to fund everything we want to for this upcoming budget.

Q: Effort needed on preventive measures. What are you doing on that? We wouldn't need all these places if there was better prevention?

MB: Yes I agree. Only 2% of the aged care budget is directed to prevention. 2/3rds on immunisation. We are trying to lift our game. Health reform: there is a Preventative Health Task Force working on this. That is addressing Smoking, Drinking, Diet & Obesity.

Health ageing needs to start in your 40s

Staying home, ageing in place for as long as possible is the key message I have been hearing during these discussions across Australia.

CACPs and EACH are too inflexible and there are not enough of them.

Productivity Commission says intermediate packages assume 10hrs per week and there needs to be more community care. We are working through how this will work.

Q: concern for future of children and grand children. Carbon Tax is confusing: explain science and why we need it to make a sustainable future. What is government doing about this?

MB: we are trying really hard on these issues. Politicians common mistake is that we go too quickly to the what and how rather than deal with the why we need this.

Over the past 12 months we are recharging the why. aspect There is a lot of questioning the integrity of the science. We have found that the media has adopted a fixed position on these issues. This makes it difficult for us to get our message across.

Carbon pricing debate has bottomed out. There is a big gap in the middle.

Q: How will market based system ensure enough aged care places in poorer and region and remote areas?

We have not yet decided to go down a market based approach yet. The alternative is a heavily regulated system. We remain open-minded on these recommendations.

CLOSE AND THANKS