

REDUCING THE NUMBER OF YOUNGER PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES LIVING IN NURSING HOMES

Issue: There are over 6,000 people aged less than 65 years living in residential aged care, including both high and low care. About 1,000 of these are aged less than 50 years. Most of these people have been admitted to aged care because they have disabilities but are unable to access adequate disability support services to meet their care needs.

Often these disabilities result from an intellectual, psychiatric, sensory, physical or neurological impairment or acquired brain injury (or a combination of these) which is likely to be permanent. As a result these people have limited ability to care for themselves, to move around and/or to communicate.

For most of these people, residential aged care is not the most appropriate form of care. While some may choose to live in a residential aged care facility, in most cases alternative options are not currently available to them. Many younger people would prefer to live in more age-appropriate specialist disability supported accommodation and receive care that is more suitable to them. Having a more appropriate environment also means they can socialise more with their peers and families. Specialist disability services such as therapy and rehabilitation would also be more readily available to them.

New joint Commonwealth and states and territories program

From July 2006, the Australian Government and states and territories will provide new, matched funding of up to \$244 million to jointly establish a capped, five-year program managed by the states and territories. The funding will aim to:

- Provide age-appropriate care for younger people with disabilities currently in residential aged care; and
- Reduce the overall number of younger people in residential aged care.

The program will focus first on people aged less than 50 years in residential aged care. Other people with disabilities inappropriately accommodated in aged care will also be eligible under the program, as well as people at risk of being placed inappropriately in aged care residences. Any move will be voluntary on the part of the younger person.

The Australian Government has responsibility for aged care services, while under the Commonwealth State/Territory Disability Agreement signed by all jurisdictions, states and territories are responsible for accommodation support services for people with disabilities.

The activities that will be funded include:

- assessments of care needs to younger people with a disability who live in aged care residences;
- negotiating and providing appropriate alternative long-term care options;
- monitoring program outcomes; and

- sharing information between jurisdictions and the disability sector on the performance of new models of care.

While some young people will remain in aged care facilities for a number of reasons, some of the alternative options under the program may include care places in the community and specialist disability supported accommodation. Those remaining in aged care residences may also be given access to specialist disability support programs appropriate to them.

In committing to establish this program, the Commonwealth and states and territories will maintain their efforts in relation to existing disability services, and the Commonwealth will continue to resource the current aged care planning ratio. This means that as people with disabilities move out of residential aged care, a greater number of older people can be accommodated.