

Senate Enquiry into Inequality in Regional Australia

Submission by Gai Sypher

I, Gai Sypher, am pleased to make a submission to the inquiry into inequality in regional Australia. This submission will address inequality relating to the provision of age care in regional and remote Queensland. More broadly this submission will focus on the lack of sustainability for the age care industry in regional and remote regions based on the current business driven model.

The region referred to in this report cover Central and Central Western Queensland.



RECOMMENDATION

Work collaboratively to develop relevant models of care. It will be important for service providers to collaborate to innovatively develop models of care that will work in rural and remote areas and I advocate on behalf of aged people to the Federal Government to consider this so that:

- Services provision is available
- financial and efficient services can be provided to clients
- they receive equitable care and choices
- the challenges they face are reduced, thereby relieving stress
- transport issues are reduced
- home service are available

Submission - Senate Inquiry into inequality in Regional Australia

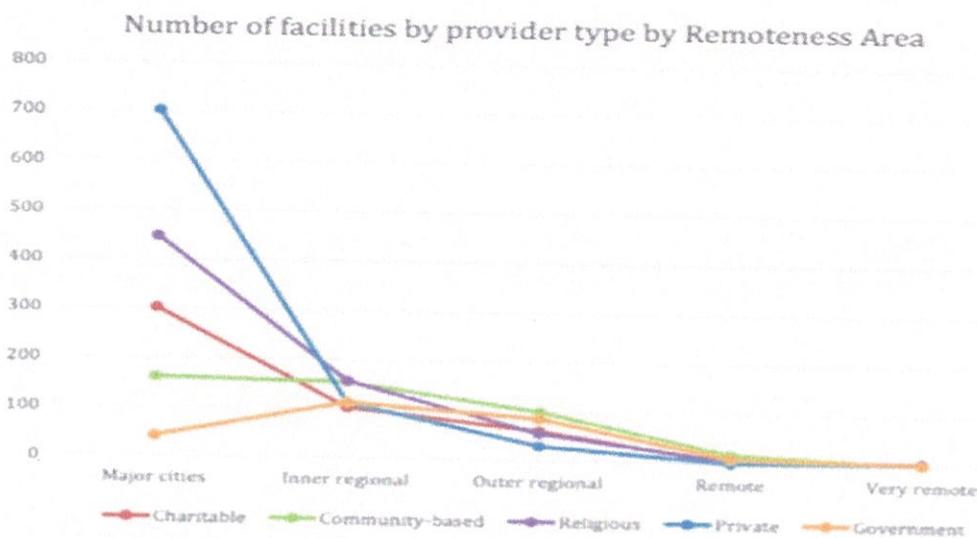
Introduction

The aged care sector is one of Australia’s largest and fastest growing service industries, employing over 350,000 people, with the Australian Government expected to spend \$17.4 billion in 2016-17. The sector is currently in a phase of substantial transformation and growth. The majority of aged care services is supplied by not-for-profit service providers. The provision of aged care services – particularly residential places – can be costly, and private for-profit providers sometimes regard remote and regional areas as too expensive for them to operate profitably. With demand increasing as Australia’s population ages, the Australian Government has introduced demand-driven service delivery that promotes Consumer Directed Care, to ensure the aged care system is sustainable.

Central and Central Western Queensland Region

In the Central and Central Western region of Queensland there are 72 different aged care services delivering aged care services. These provide 671 community care places; 1,643 residential aged care places, and 30 transition care places. For the year to June 2016, these services cost the Federal Government \$111M.

The data below (Figure 25) shows that access to residential aged care in remote and very remote communities is extremely limited. The type of provider of residential aged care in rural and remote Australia differs from major cities substantially. The largest provider type in major cities is the private provider, but their market share outside major cities is extremely limited – particularly once you leave inner regional locations (National Rural Health Alliance Inc, 2016).



Private providers are not found in locations that operate on marginally sustainable business models, such as those facilities that operate in remote and very remote communities. The concept of consumer choice is thus more constrained as you progress into more remote locations. In these locations, the need for legislated requirements and regulation is vital to guarantee both access to residential and community based aged care and to an acceptable quality of care (National Rural Health Alliance Inc, 2016).

Problems faced by the elderly in regional and remote areas

Lack of choice

Aged care provision in rural and remote areas may be limited to one or two providers who have less need to compete for custom, through marketing or self-promotion, than their metropolitan counterparts, leading to 'information-poor' consumers. A small pool of providers may also result in lack of service differentiation or innovation (National Aged Care Alliance, 2017).

Issues engaging with My Aged Care

Older people living in rural and remote areas experience the same issues with My Aged Care, that have been identified in more populated areas, but their experience is exacerbated by the following:

- poor or intermittent internet coverage
- lack of access to computer equipment, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote areas
- lack of access to alternate sources of information
- difficulties relating to distance, time and cost for services, including assessors' capacity to provide face-to-face assessment in people's homes (National Aged Care Alliance, 2017).

Issues highlighted by Aged & Community Services Australia

Aged & Community Services Australia CEO, Pat Sparrow, highlighted a number of issues that were particularly important for aged people in regional and remote regions:

- The Government's current market approach to aged care will not work for regional, rural and remote areas, so it is important to determine what will be viable (with regards to funding) in these locations.
- Rural properties cause difficulties when assessing assets, especially those that are the home to two-three generations of family.
- Transport costs for Home Care services do not change for clients that are in rural and remote locations. It will be important for Government to look at how else to deliver services to make services to people outside metropolitan areas practical and efficient.
- It may be more efficient and practical for someone local (rural and remote) to be contracted to help with support: e.g. household support, with other local community members carrying out various tasks for efficiency.
- Supported housing should be considered for a cheaper and better way to deliver home care
- Need to consider the things that make rural and remote providers successful.

What needs to happen in regional and remote areas

Work collaboratively to develop relevant models of care. It will be important for service providers to collaborate to innovatively develop models of care that will work in rural and remote areas and to advocate on behalf of aged people to the Federal Government to consider this so that:

- service provision is available
- financial and efficient services can be provided to clients
- they receive equitable care and choices where possible
- the challenges they face are reduced, thereby relieving stress
- transport issues are reduced
- home services are available