



OPENING STATEMENT
30 April 2013

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SENATE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

HEARING

Inquiry into the *Aged Care (Living Longer Living Better) Bill 2013; Australian Aged Care Quality Agency Bill 2013; Australian Aged Care Quality Agency (Transitional Provisions) Bill 2013; Aged Care (Bond Security) Amendment Bill 2013; Aged Care (Bond Security) Levy Amendment Bill 2013*

SYDNEY

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Australia's growing ageing population is engaged and informed. Ageing Australians and their families quite rightly expect that they will have access to the services that will allow them to maintain their health, their autonomy and their dignity. Everyone who has involvement in the aged care system - whether they are politicians, administrators, service providers, older people and their families - understand the need for a sustainable, accessible, high quality aged care system that meets the needs of older people. We know that the current system requires fundamental reform.

UnitingCare Australia strongly supports the passage of the five bills that will implement the Living Longer, Living Better reforms. These bills are a significant step towards enacting essential elements of the recommendations in the Productivity Commission's report, *Caring for Older Australians*.

We value the important reform initiatives to be progressively implemented which include:

- increased provision of Home Care services and additional levels of Home Care
- greater choice and control for consumers
- a more robust and broader quality assurance with a focus on quality rather than standards and expanded coverage into in home care
- removal of the high/low care distinction in residential aged care
- a new fees and charges regime designed to improve service quality, provide greater transparency and consumer protection while increasing the level of user contributions for those who can afford to pay
- the provision for annual and lifetime caps on these contributions
- the ability to offer additional amenities on a fee for service basis
- the removal of the 25 per cent 'claw-back' from extra service places.

UnitingCare Australia welcomes the comprehensive review provisions in the **Aged Care (Living Longer Living Better) Bill 2013** (pages 2-4) which will enable thorough evaluation of the impact of the reforms, leading to the next stage of the reform process.

UnitingCare Australia is the National Body for the UnitingCare network, and is a national agency of the Uniting Church in Australia.

UnitingCare is one of the largest providers of community services in Australia. Around 1,500 sites provide services and support to more than 2 million Australians each year. The network employs 35,000 staff and 24,000 volunteers. We provide services to older Australians, children, young people and families, Indigenous Australians, people with disabilities, the poor and disadvantaged, people from culturally diverse backgrounds and older Australians in urban, rural and remote communities.

UnitingCare Australia advocates for policies and programs that will improve people's quality of life. We are committed to speaking with and on behalf of those who are the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

UnitingCare aged care organisations across Australia include:

State	Organisation
Qld	Blue Care
Qld	Wesley Mission Brisbane
SA	Eldercare
SA	Resthaven
SA	Uniting Communities
SA	UnitingCare Wesley Pt. Adelaide
SA	UnitingCare Wesley Bowden
SA	Helping Hand
Vic/Tas	Uniting Aged Care Vic/Tas
Vic	UnitingCare Community Options
NSW/ACT	UnitingCare Ageing NSW/ACT
NSW	Wesley Mission in Sydney
NSW	Parramatta Mission
WA	Juniper

UnitingCare Australia has been actively involved in providing advice to the government on the shape of these reforms and their impact on older people and the services that support them. We will continue to work to advance these reforms in a way that integrates good policy and best practice.

UnitingCare agencies have a particular focus on ensuring good supports for older people with limited means. We will maintain a watching brief on the aged care reforms to ensure that older people on low and moderate incomes can gain access to the supports they need under the new arrangements.

It is crucial that this Aged Care legislation is passed in the next sitting of Parliament in order to commence the reform process. This long-awaited, historic legislation will make a significant difference to the lives of many older Australians, especially those on low incomes.

We thank the Committee for the opportunity to present today and are happy to take questions.