

Committee Secretary-Dr Margot Kerley  
Standing Committee On Ageing  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600

16.08.2002

Dear Dr Kerley

We the residents of O'Mara House Aged Facility, which represents 50 persons, would like to submit a range of issues into immediate problems affecting the aged. We hope the issues submitted to you will assist the inquiry and help develop both short and long-term strategies into the ageing of the Australian population.

As individuals the process of ageing appears very intimidating, depressing and overpowering. One feels a loss of control due to many factors. We are all in this facility due to different circumstances. For many of us entry into the facility has come about by the loss of a partner. The grief of losing a partner has impacted on our health ending in admission into hospital. While in hospital decisions are made in consultation with family as to your future. Today's lifestyle doesn't allow for the family support that is required to remain in the family home once your needs progress beyond a certain point.

We are then presented with the next process of ageing, which is disposing of the family home to pay the bonds required to live in a Government Subsidised facility. We must pack a lifetime of belonging that we have worked so hard for, and dispose of them; only keeping the minimal that can fit in a bedroom. Our sense of security is thrown into turmoil as we leave our neighbours and give up the family pets, which we are so accustomed too. This adds to our grief.

Even though every effort is made to help us adjust and to give us hope to the next phase of our lives we are constantly drained by increasing demands on us financially. What was a dream to work hard, save for retirement, and to leave a legacy for our children for many of us no longer exists.

Our fortnightly pension does not allow us to live a valued life in older age; it merely allows us to exist. Once our fortnightly tariff is paid we are left with an average of \$40.00 a week to pay for our additional expenses. You may wonder what other expenses we would have, however, getting older produces expenses with the deterioration of the body. Following is a list of items that nearly all of us have additional expenses with:

- Medication is the first expense that absorbs a great amount of this \$40.00. Glasses need to be replaced more often with deterioration of eyesight, and the repairs of broken arms on glasses.
- Hearing Aide maintenance costs, and travel costs due to distance to get to Audiologists to maintenance repairs
- Dental visits for repairs to dentures, fillings and extractions.
- Travel expenses, like X-Rays, Pathology, when doctors are unable to visit the facility and you have to go to the clinic.
- The cost of dressings to the skin as our healing processes is slower
- Special creams, lotions, and shampoo to maintain skin integrity.
- Incontinence pads, condom drainage, and waterproof bedding, to maintain what little dignity we have left.

- Elastic stockings to reduce swelling.
- Special fitting shoes, walking aides and maintenance for these aides, and prostheses, to enable us to maintain what mobility we have.
- Podiatrist costs, to treat our calluses, and bunions.
- Repairs to electrical equipment like electric wheelchairs, the cost of tagging personal electrical appliances to comply with regulations.

After these costs very few of us have any money left over to purchase other daily costs which allow us some sort of standard of living such as clothing, a telephone, an occasional outing, gifts to family for birthdays and Christmas, treats like a packet of biscuits or bar of chocolate.

Some of the other issues that we are faced with on a regular basis, are the shortage of doctors, and the time it takes to get an appointment with any doctor let alone your own doctor.

Distance needed to be travel to see any form of medical attention such as Specialists, Hospitals, X-Rays, and Special Pathology this distance being 30 kilometres return trip. The National Acoustic Hearing Centre being 60 kilometres return trip.

The Community Health Centre Dentist is a 100-kilometer return trip.

The waiting lists for some of these services can be up to 4 mouths in which time our health can greatly deteriorate.

Being in a rural setting we have restriction on the use of services such as Medical Specialists, bus and rail transport.

The pressures placed on our caring staff as they take on additional duties to maintain our standard of care, above and beyond the call of duty.

We hope that this will assist in your inquiry so when you reach to our age, ageing Australians will have a better quality of life, be valued in society, and be empowered to create the change that is required to do so.

Yours faithfully,

Nancy Dunbar  
President of O'Mara House Residents Committee  
O'Mara House Aged Facility  
Hunter Road  
Traralgon VIC 3844