

Raelene West

Senate Inquiry into Aged Care

In Particular Reference to Term C: The appropriateness of young people with disabilities being accommodated in residential aged care facilities and the extent to which these residents needs are met (or not being met) under current funding arrangements.

Approximately 6000 young Australians currently live in aged care facilities across Australia. The inadequacy of this because of the lack of alternatives in regards to accessible housing, community residential units (CRUs) and community support structures should be a serious concern for our community. Due to lack of funding, many young people that have undergone catastrophic injury as a result of an acquired brain injury (ABI), MS, Muscular Dystrophy or stroke, have no other option than to move into aged care facilities across Australia. The resources and support they need to live their lives independently and live the life they choose do not exist.

From personal experience of having acquired a physical disability (quadriplegia) at the age 22, I have firsthand knowledge of the difficulties in adjusting to life after a catastrophic injury. Despite the current trend of attempting to dismantle the service, personally I was covered by motor vehicle insurance. At that time I was therefore able to access services and provisions required for long-term rehabilitation and reintegration. I have since been able to purchase my own home, undertake modifications and with the assistance of attendant carers, now live and study independently with-in the community.

I am very aware that placing a young person with a newly acquired disability in an aged care facility because no funding exists for any other form of rehabilitation or accommodation could only be detrimental to that person's long term well-being and redevelopment. A catastrophic injury is a devastating time for any individual and family. It is a critical time of high stress, fear, and concern over what the future will hold. It is appalling that at this time, you may be also faced with the situation that because of lack of funding, you or your loved one may be living in a nursing home indefinitely because you or your family can't afford to do renovations/modifications to a home and there are no other long-term community rehabilitation or adequate accommodation provisions.

A nursing home is an inadequate environment for a young person to be accommodated in while facing the challenge of adapting to a future that includes a disability. An environment where a young person with a newly acquired disability is surrounded by the aged with a sedentary lifestyle and high death rate is emotionally distressing, particularly on a young individual who may have only recently undergone a life-threatening trauma. The environment of an aged care facility also significantly reduces the ability of an individual to work towards a future, re-develop life skills and re-establish social and inclusive networks. Lack of resources to support an individual in this process only further reduces the opportunities for these young people to contribute and be inclusive in society in the same capacity as their peers.

What is needed is funding that creates pathways to provide best practice in the assessing and monitoring of healthcare and that lead to appropriate environments for accommodation and rehabilitation. The importance of resources to provide this appropriate care and ensure adequate provisions, other than those of an aged care facility, is a key component in ensuring the wellbeing of some of our communities most marginalized and vulnerable members. The ability of a young person with a disability to create their own future and choice of life is not a path that should begin in an aged care facility, but in the most supportive environment our community has to offer.

Raelene West
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