

SUBMISSION

SENATE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

11th July 2007

Dear Committee Members

I write this submission to the committee to raise concerns that I and many of my senior citizen friends in the wider community would like brought to your attention.

While we are pleased to recently receive the \$500 from the May budget, the money is not significant when you take into account the many obstacles that older Australians, whether on pensions or self funded retirees, have been encountering on a daily basis. This money will help towards paying our winter utility bills but it is very important that members of your committee are made aware that it has been a long time since people in my age group have been given any consideration.

I briefly list the kinds of financial demands that have burdened people such as myself during the past decade that a one off payment of \$500 cannot possibly absorb. In a country that currently has about \$12 billion plus in surplus, I find the following realities very difficult to understand:

- The abolition of the Commonwealth Dental Health Program
- Removal of free hearing aids and hearing services for health care card holders
- Cuts to Centrelink staff who give financial advice to retirees
- Introduction of nursing care fees, including an annual and an extra daily fee
- Abolishing the Earnings Credit Scheme resulting in pension cuts
- A reduction in the number of pension advances
- Price rises for PBS medicines which have out stripped pharmaceutical allowance increases
- GST induced price increases in many crucial areas for pensioners
- Severe cuts to funding to peak pensioner and retiree groups.

- The ever soaring costs of food, utilities and petrol which is having a devastating impact on older Australians trying to survive on a pension.

Whenever we see media coverage relating to senior Australians it is generally in relation to health and/or aged care.

There are many, many senior citizens who are actively engaged in the community and it is my understanding that we represent the largest group who perform volunteer work in the community. Considering the list above, the pressure on pensioners is far greater and increasing. Our ability to continue to participate in the wider community on a voluntary basis is seriously hampered by the points I have listed above.

I write to ask that committee takes all these matters I have listed into account during this inquiry.

Another issue I want to take the opportunity to raise is that senior citizens need a national policy that relates to them directly, but not only with a "health" or "aged care" agenda. I suggest that policies be developed specifically for the seniors in our community as policies that currently exist for family and youth. A national approach to legislation with respect to a healthy, active and growing older population is an outcome that I and many others look forward to.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my submission.

Yours sincerely

Shan Smith