

The Secretary,
Senate Community Affairs Committee,

Dear Secretary,

This is being written in response to a letter to me from Sharon Bird MP, suggesting that, as an old-age pensioner, I make a submission to your committee.

I live alone in public housing. My total disposable income per fortnight is \$378.00. From that I have to pay the rent on a tiny unit, meet medical expenses, and buy the essentials (food, clothing, electricity, 'phone, and the cost of keeping an elderly car on the road). Needless to say, it is a daily challenge, contributing to nervous strain that someone my age should not have to endure.

This is a brief list of some of my perennial problems:

1. Every time there is a CPI increase the Department of Housing raises my rent, so that I gain little or nothing.
2. Telephone (essential for an ailing person living alone). I have taken advantage of Telstra's offer to pensioners whereby I pay no upfront costs but receive only incoming calls. That lasts only for one year, then I have to pay a \$55.00 re-connection fee.
3. Eye Care. Because, as a migrant Scot (arriving in 1956) I have a part-British pension which yields more than \$500 p.a. I am not eligible for local eye-care pensioner benefits. I am technically blind and need special index multi-focal lenses, the cheapest version of which costs more than \$300, plus the cost of appropriate frames.
4. General health care. Recently I had an operation for uterine cancer and I was dismayed to find that I was not eligible for any kind of home care. Instead, I was given the 'phone number of a private contractor who charges \$25.00 an hour. I have no relatives in the area, and live in a block of pensioner units where most of my neighbours are in even worse physical condition than I am.
5. Dental care. What care? I am absolutely disgusted with the buck-passing between the federal and state governments, while decaying teeth increasingly impinge on my general health - and deterioration there ends up costing the health system more than dental attention would, quite apart from the ongoing pain (and embarrassment) I suffer.
6. Community interaction. Like most other aged pensioners I cannot afford internet access, which has become the prime method of keeping in touch with friends and relatives. Even an old computer is out of my reach, apart from the monthly charges of an ISP. There is absolutely not a dollar to spare.
7. Petrol prices. Where my housing block is situated there is an adequate daytime bus service that I use regularly, but the routes are limited, fares are increasing, and if I need to go elsewhere or in the evenings I have to rely on keeping my old jalopy on the road. The huge recent increases in petrol and oil prices, plus other charges, threaten me with immobility. I do not see why pensioners should not have some claim on a normal life. I am in my seventies, but I worked hard and paid taxes all my life. The long illness of a husband, now dead, cost me my home and all our savings. My story, I believe, is not atypical.

I do hope that your committee can adopt a realistic attitude to the plight many of us senior citizens find ourselves in. Life is a continual financial struggle.

Yours faithfully,

(Mrs) Josephine Sands