

The Secretary  
Enquiry Into  
Cost Of Living Pressures On Older Australians

How should we come to grips with the problems of the aged element of our population... are there in fact any problems that society should address?

We think there are, at least the following:

The Evolving World:

Australia (or the world) has never been in the position of dealing with an aged population numerically dominated by 60 plus age group.

For those 'aged' who are physically and mentally able to get and hold a job the problems are deferred. However, more often than not physical deterioration limits activity in older people to just surviving.

Health professionals have been working at understanding the unique way the aged present their problems and indeed the problems unique to ageing people. From our point of view the challenge is to get their understandings down the management line to people who make age relevant decisions.

A quick example. The use of Calcium supplement is strongly recommended to strengthen aged bones. Calcium supplements have just been removed from the Pharmaceutical Benefits List. Those who remember that they should be taking their pills now have to decide if they can afford them.

We would strongly urge the provision of a segment of business training which focuses the administrators mind on the effects of their decision on the aged. Perhaps they could just ask themselves- 'would I do this to my mother, how would this decision affect her?'

At the same time 'the aged' have some learning to do for themselves.

The ageing process is sneaky, one day you find that you can't quite walk as far as you expect. One day you find the shop assistant can count out your change faster than you can add the prices.

Various professionals comment on the psychological problems of living in a changing, and sometimes shrinking, world. There seems to us to be a need to re-educate the ageing so that they can be comfortable in dealing with the new world as they find it.

Health:

We suspect that there are two levels of ageing, the split to old age coming with the onset of health issues.

A simple example is the local walking group where one of the three, takes a fall. She now lacks confidence to go walking and the other two don't go because they can't go without Mabel!

Activity groups (such examples as Heart Moves and Tai Chi) fill a great supportive role for many old aged people. The problem to deal with is localising their services, making it socially acceptable to be involved, to minimize travel and thus, keep people in their familiar surroundings.

The older persons we know seem to be aware of the need to keep active, mentally and physically. We need more avenues to make it possible.

Financial well-being:

The changing world that the older person faces obviously revolves around money: we feel that it is desirable to foster as much independence as possible.

Statisticians tell us that over the last 6 years the Cost of Living has risen 17%, and (they say) the cost of filling the shopping trolley is well within our capacity. Unfortunately our water bill just arrived. It tells us that our \$100 dollar account is about to escalate to \$300!

The shopping trolley concept is tricky, it looks at the low cost of imported computers, audio visual equipment, and clothes. These low cost items lower the average of such items as Milk, Bread, Utilities and Health Care.

The staples have gone up over 6 years- Milk- 28%, Bread- 21%, Utilities- 28% and, Health Care- 38%. Now that puts the Budget sweeteners into perspective!

As a group of the population, older people are trying to do more with less. Physically they are less able to do their basic household maintenance in homes which are generally in need of more care.

The cost of fuel cannot be ignored, electricity, gas and of course petrol. Even transport costs are edging up where this special population should be using public transport more. (Always assuming it is available to use.)

Money worries must rate highly when considering 'Well being'. While the shopping trolley concept is well entrenched it must be accepted that computers and imported clothes don't feature on our shopping lists, not like the cost of bread, butter and pills.

As battlers we are not benefiting from 'low inflation'. A method of calculating a cost of living factor for the special needs of older persons is required.

## Summary

The aged members of our community are moving into a new world and need support to cope with the change. Those charged with dealing with them also need support in dealing with a changing kind of 'client'.

Physically and emotionally, the aged are challenged and could be materially assisted by existing services being extended into the community.

Financially, the aged are looking at a very challenging future. The costs of meeting their living requirements appear to be growing faster than their income.

Thank you for this opportunity to raise these matters, if there is any other way we can assist the enquiry please do not hesitate to contact us.

Dean and Patricia Cornish