

The Committee Secretary  
Senate Finance & Public Administration Committee  
Department of the Senate  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to make a submission to your Committee's inquiry into residential and community aged care in Australia and to recommend that the Committee use Norfolk Island as a case study of the problems facing funding, planning, allocation, capital and equity of residential and community aged care in regional communities.

Norfolk Island is an isolated community located in the Pacific Ocean some 1600 kilometres east of NSW. As a self governing Territory of Australia, it has a unique set of arrangements for the funding and delivery of health, hospital and aged care. These arrangements and their shortcomings have been examined and identified in various parliamentary and other inquiries which found that the delivery of residential and community aged care on Norfolk Island fell below national standards. See, for example, the 2001 report *In the Pink Or In The Red - Health Services on Norfolk Island* by the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories and the 1997 report on Norfolk Island by the Commonwealth Grants Commission.

Despite these reports, problems with residential and community aged care on Norfolk Island continue.

On mainland Australia, the elderly are encouraged to remain within the security of their own homes for as long as possible. On Norfolk Island the idea seems to be to get them into our local Hospital and onto the "Veranda" (a wing of the Hospital set aside for the elderly).

There is an acute and ongoing lack of adequate aged care facilities at the hospital, particularly for dementia patients.

At the same time, there is almost no provision by the Norfolk Island Government – which is solely responsible for funding and delivering aged care on Norfolk – to assist with keeping our elderly in their homes. The Norfolk Island Hospital does provide a weekly visit by a nurse who takes blood-pressure and a basic assessment of the person's general health, but this does not include assistance with personal hygiene or preparation with meals etc. As a result, an elderly person on Norfolk has to depend entirely on family to provide the level of care require for them to stay in their home, or be moved to the "veranda" at the hospital.

It is especially noticeable for the veterans of WWII, who at this stage, all need help at home, and it falls entirely on their families on the island to provide for all the services that are provided by Homecare on the mainland. There is little opportunity for the family to obtain respite care.

My observation of the care level of the patients in the Hospital's aged care facility is quite good if the patient has dementia, or is no longer mentally agile. However if a patient wishes to have a conversation, or relate to the other patients in the facility, it would be a terrible place to be. There is no facility in place to stimulate the patients physically or mentally, and this is not to the benefit of the elderly patient.

While the staff are very caring, I am not convinced they have the training and support to deal with the problems they will face with the elderly. I have observed that some staff become very frustrated with the elderly, and require them to do things, with total disregard to the fact that it may not suit the patients.

The main reason for this situation on Norfolk Island is:

1. The lack of funds in the Hospital budget or from the Norfolk Island Government to provide anything more than basic care, often employing untrained staff, with no funding to provide any up-skilling.
2. The lack of funding from the Australian Government for aged care on Norfolk Island and the Norfolk Island Government's failure to date to apply for a federal loan or the like to pay for new aged care facilities on the Island.
3. The lack of training of the staff, and/or there not being a pool of skilled staff to staff the facility available on the Island.
- 34 The lack of commitment by the Norfolk Island Government to provide a better service to the elderly, who seem to quietly accept their difficulties, without complaint. The traditional method of dealing with the aged on the Island was for the family to provide the care, but with young people moving away from the Island and the necessity for so many people to work fulltime these days, there is no one there for the elderly.

I would appreciate if your committee would include Norfolk Island as part of your inquiry, using the information provided above as a basis to give the situation a more thorough investigation and to ensure these elderly Australians are given the facilities and the level of care and support they deserve in their old age

Yours sincerely