



Legislative Assembly for the
Australian Capital Territory

Select Committee on Social Policy

Submission cover sheet

Inquiry into Petition 017-25 and E-Petition 005-25: Closure of Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre in Rivett

Submission number: 03

Submitter: Ruth Carter

Date authorised for publication: 20 May 2025

I along with my extended family, friends and the wider community have had a long association with Burrangiri Aged Care and Respite Centre.

My Father Paul Plunkett, was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease in the early 1970's. Initially, he attended the Burrangiri Aged Care Day Program. In fact, he would attend several days a week. This allowed my Mother Joan Plunkett the much needed respite, in order for her to sustain her ongoing care that she provided Paul.

The staff at the Centre were a dedicated team, consisting of Registered nurses, and other qualified experienced care workers. The model of care was holistic, flexible and personalised. Paul, could participate in the group or individual activities. Paul valued his time in this program, as he felt validated, nurtured, respected, supported and well cared for. He had a good connection with the staff, and other members of the community, he was socially connected. The program offered continuity of care, as many staff members had worked at the centre for numerous years. Continuity of care was extremely beneficial for Paul, along with other clients, as they felt safe in that environment. Furthermore, it allowed them the opportunity to build up excellent rapport with the staff, this in turn reduced Paul's anxiety, I am sure others too, and in turn, the staff were able to meet the needs of not only Paul, but other clients too in an ongoing way. As a result of this, they got to know each other very well indeed.

As time progressed, Paul deteriorated further as a result of his Parkinson's. This is when we commenced ongoing overnight respite at Burrangiri, in fact, Paul had numerous weeks of overnight respite over many years at Burrangiri. Again, this allowed Joan the much needed respite in order for her to sustain her caring role for Paul. This also permitted Joan to travel interstate in order to have holidays. As time progressed, Joan was no longer able to sustain caring for Paul at home, this is when we secured him a Permanent bed in a Residential facility.

Over the years, other members of our extended family, along with many other people we know, have also benefited from the services that Burrangiri provide. In fact, Joan who is now 101 years of age who resided in her own home up until last year, has just recently enjoyed ongoing overnight respite at Burrangiri. Again, this respite was essential as Joan now resides with my oldest sister who is 80. My sister needed this valuable respite in order for her to sustain her ongoing role of providing care for Joan.

It is important to emphasise, that our recent experience with Burrangiri was exceptional. Firstly, it only took 1 phone call to Burrangiri to secure the respite, we then completed the necessary admission paperwork. Initially, we requested 10 nights of respite, but during this time I enquired as to whether Joan could stay longer in order for my elderly sister to further rest. Due to a cancellation, we were able to secure another week. It was during this time, that staff informed me that there was another cancellation therefore Joan could stay longer if she liked, as they acknowledged Joan's care needs. They also recognised that the additional respite would be extremely beneficial for my elderly sister. Joan was very happy with those arrangements along with my elderly sister, and happily stayed on longer.

It is important to note, that during Joan's stay at Burrangiri, Joan, along with other clients and family members became aware that the centre would be closing down, and that after the 30 June 2025, Burrangiri, would no longer be taking any new admissions. During this time, we were also able to ascertain that the Health Minister Rachel Stephen-Smith said that Aged Care is a Commonwealth responsibility, and as a result of that, the ACT Government would no longer provide future funding for the centre to remain open. The Centre is an ACT Health site, operated by The Salvation Army, and the Government were not going to renew their Lease in order for the Salvation Army to continue to manage and run the centre, like they have been doing so efficiently, for the last 35 years. The Salvation Army specialises in providing respite (short-term) for our older vulnerable members of the community. This service is truly beneficial for not only for the carers, but also the person being cared for too.

We were also able to ascertain that the Health Minister Rachel Stephen-Smith claimed that the Burrangiri building was "not fit for purpose". I along with Joan and extended family would not allow Joan to stay in such a place that is not "fit for purpose". We found this statement to be quite the opposite. In fact; from our own observations we found Burrangiri to be a solid building, very clean and tidy, with adequate ventilation. We acknowledge that Joan had to share a bathroom with other clients, but she was not disturbed by that. In fact, Joan has also shared bathrooms with other patients on admissions to our local Hospitals in Canberra over the years on many occasions, that also did not disturb her. We also found the equipment to be in good working order whilst at Burrangiri. Furthermore, we also found the staff to be extremely nurturing, respectful, inclusive, kind and caring not only towards Joan, but us as a family too. Joan also enjoyed the meals, she said that they were "delicious, tasty and nutritious, and the bonus was they were prepared and cooked in the onsite kitchen, and that the menu was rotated regularly."

We were also able to ascertain that there was potentially a plan for the clients from Arcadia House which is a Drug and Alcohol Centre to be transferred across to Burrangiri when Burrangiri ceased operation. This indeed, was extremely disappointing, also stressful, as we felt, why close down an existing facility like Burrangiri that operates at full capacity that provides the much needed services for our community in order to allow a Drug and Alcohol facility to operate from. As a family, along with Joan, we felt that it is not the correct setting to offer such services, particularly when there are 3 Childcare Centres adjacent, not to mention the local Rivett shops across the carpark adjacent from Burrangiri where clients could potentially purchase their cigarettes and alcohol from.

As a result of the above, Joan at the ripe old age of 101 who is also a World War 11 Veteran who advocated and fought for our Country many years ago, and is still advocating and fighting for her rights still to this day was informed that Politicians were coming into Burrangiri to have a look around, and as a result of that Joan was exceptionally keen to have discussions with them.

Joan wanted to be proactive in relation to being heard, because she told me that it was important, as she previously had secured the very much needed day and overnight respite for Paul in an ongoing way for many years, and that now she too was here experiencing the benefits of that. Joan felt that moving forward it was important for other people to be provided with the same opportunity that she, along with Paul and others have also had. So,

on the day that the politicians were attending Burringiri in order to do their media release, Joan was up, bright and early, showered and dressed, hair done and ready to go. Joan did get the opportunity to speak with the Politicians on the day infact, Joan told Senator David Pocock that “the staff at Burringiri have an extraordinary capacity to love everyone and to deal with them. You’d think that their whole existence was just to make you happy and look after you”. Afterwards, Joan told me that she enjoyed her discussions with the politicians and said as a result of those discussions that she felt that she was listened to, valued, also respected.

Furthermore, it must be noted that whilst Joan was having respite she also attended the silent protest outside Katy Gallagher’s Office in Woden the day before Anzac Day. Joan explained that it was also very important as she was not only paying respect, but also fighting for ongoing rights, for not only herself but many others too. Katy Gallagher respectively took the time out of her busy schedule in order to come out the front of her office to meet with Joan. Katy had discussions with Joan. Again, Joan was very appreciative of that, she felt listened to, valued and respected. Additionally, Joan also spoke with Jessie Price as she too kindly came into Burrangiri centre on a Saturday morning to especially speak with Joan. Again, Joan was extremely appreciative of that.

Joan is now back residing with my elderly sister who is kindly providing Joan with 24 hour phenomenal care. We all need to be mindful that my sister is elderly, therefore it is paramount that she has regular respite, and needs to plan ahead for future respite in order for her to sustain her caring role. Infact, we need to secure future respite in July 2025.

Rachel Stephen-Smith explained that carers can now access future respite in Aged Care facilities. She also stated that carers can contact the Carers Gateway in order to secure future respite.

So, on the 9.4.25 that is exactly what I did. I contacted the Carers Gateway in order to secure respite for Joan and was told “there is a short supply of respite and it will take sometime to secure respite, we have a wait list”. I was then informed “in order to secure respite that a member of the Residential team would contact me”. When I enquired “when would a member of that team contact me,” I was told “they will contact me within 2-3 Weeks time.

Time progressed, and as at 1 May 2025 I had still not received a call from a member of the Residential team, therefore I rang the Carers Gateway again. I was informed “that there is a wait list, and that the receptionist would now email the Residential team to inform them that I still haven’t received a call from them”. I then asked “when will they call me back”, I was informed that they would call me back tomorrow.

Time progressed, and as at the 7 May 2025 I still had not received a call from a member of the Residential team so I called again. I was then informed “that they only work part-time, 2 days per week on Thursdays and Fridays. I explained that they still had not contacted me, I was then informed “they will ring me tomorrow”.

On the 8.5.25 I rang the Carers Gateway later in the afternoon to inform them that I still had not received a call. It was then, I was informed that “████ is away today”. As a result of that, I

requested the Carers Gateway to send a high priority email to [REDACTED] as I have still not received a call from any member of the Residential team, and that my initial phone call for my respite enquiry was on the 9.4.25.

Finally, on the 12.5.24 at 2.50pm I received a call from [REDACTED] from the Carers Gateway in relation to my inquiry into short term respite. The response was not good, infact [REDACTED] explained that respite in the ACT is at capacity everything is booked out, and at the moment currently there are only 2 places, Uniting Anala at Gordon and Baptist Care, Carey Gardens Red Hill who take advance bookings for respite which you are required to book 3 months in advance. [REDACTED] also explained, that she could email me a list of other Residential facilities that I could contact in order to secure short term respite. [REDACTED] also mentioned that short term respite is also available at the Cottages but due to Joans care needs she would quite possibly not be able to secure respite there. I asked [REDACTED] what would happen if my sister now became unwell and was no longer able to care for Joan. [REDACTED] explained that if we needed to secure emergency respite for Joan due to my sister being unwell then Joan would need to secure that in a hospital setting as a social admission.

It is important to emphasise, that I am much younger than my elderly sister who is 80, and that I have the energy to sustain and undertake the above, unlike my elderly sister.

It must now be further emphasised in comparison; that on the 9.4.25 as a member of the community I contacted Burrangiri in order to secure a respite bed, and at that time was provided with a date immediately, and that I could also secure the respite bed on 28/4/25 and that Joan would not need an ACAT in order to secure the respite. As a family, we are also aware of the very long wait lists in our community for individuals to secure an ACAT assessment within the community.

As a family, we acknowledge that a night at Burrangiri would be far more cost effective for our Health system, as apposed to an overnight stay or more within a hospital system. As you can see in relation to the above, there was a huge comparison in securing a respite bed for Joan. I received immediate confirmation from Burrangiri on my first phone call, and as at 12.5.25, at 2.50pm only just received my first call from the Residential team in relation to securing a respite bed for Joan (I have been waiting for that call since the 9.4.25). As a result, at this stage my elderly sister is unable to secure/confirm her plans in July to allow her to have a holiday due to the fact she has no confirmation of a respite bed. This is an extremely stressful, frustrating and disappointing situation to be in. Furthermore, I must also emphasise that I have also contacted alternative respite facilities in Canberra and was informed that they don't have short term respite beds.

It is important to note, that Burrangiri is the largest provider of aged care respite in Canberra consisting of 15 respite beds, delivering nearly 50% of all respite bed nights in the ACT. No ACAT assessment is required to secure respite there either. It is also important to note, if I cannot secure future respite for Joan, that I would be extremely concerned about the health and well-being of my elderly sister aged 80, along with Joan, not to mention the extended family. As a result of not being able to secure future respite, there is also a very high possibility that my elderly sister will end up being admitted to a hospital setting due to

her significant decline, adding to the strain of an already burdened Health system. Furthermore, as a result, Joan will also need to be admitted to a hospital setting as a social admission, as unfortunately, there are no other family members that are in a position to provide the very much needed 24 hour ongoing care that Joan requires.

It must also be emphasised that as a family who has relied on the ongoing services that Burrangiri offer, at no time were we ever contacted by Government representatives or alike, in order to provide genuine feedback for an organisation that has provided the very much needed respite for our family members, friends or the extended community.

Collectively, we feel, why close a facility such as Burrangiri, when it is meeting the immediate and extended needs of our community, and also runs at full capacity, particularly when there are no short term respite beds currently available in Canberra. "When I did eventually receive the call from the Residential team member from the Carers Gateway, I was told "We are at capacity all booked out said [REDACTED]." I certainly have provided the evidence of that in the above information, and am very concerned as a member of our extended community that once our community realize that this is the case, that when they try to secure future short term respite beds that all hell will break loose. I also acknowledge, and imagine, that there wouldn't be too many people like myself, or my extended family that would have the ongoing commitment, dedication care, and patience, to secure short term respite like I have done. This in itself, is truly concerning, also alarming. It is truly a catastrophic situation. Joan, our family, friends and the extended community feel that many vulnerable people just like Joan will end up in hospital, along with their Carers. Furthermore, we believe that we will see many Carers as a result engaging in Dump and Runs of their loved ones at local Emergency Departments due to the fact that they are no longer able to provide or sustain the much needed ongoing care to their loved ones for a variety of reasons, mainly being, that they are totally exhausted as a result of not been able to secure the very much needed respite in a timely manner.

It must be noted that The Royal Commission into Aged Care was established in 2018. The purpose of this was to protect and improve the safety, health, wellbeing and quality of life of people receiving Government funded aged care in response to systemic issues in funding, policy, culture and operation. When reflecting on the above, we are doing a disservice to our vulnerable members of the community, and their families by closing down a service like Burrangiri that is operating at full capacity all year round, that provides the much needed ongoing day/night respite care in a timely, respectful and effortless manner. Furthermore, currently the community needs clarity, also certainty, moving forward in relation to securing the very much needed ongoing day or overnight respite that Burrangiri offers today in a timely and effortless manner. From my examples, it is clear we are not been provided with that, as the Carers Gateway are unable to even call back in a timely manner to ensure that people can secure short-term respite beds.

Government should have a great sense of obligation in relation to this current situation and act immediately. Perhaps take the following advice from Senator David Pocock (ACT Independent Senator), and that is;

"I am calling on both major parties to step in and commit to providing funding to save over half of the ACT's respite beds and keep Burrangiri open." David Pocock also said that the

ACT Government's decision to close this centre in June with no plan to plug the gap is short-sighted and will put more pressure on our already overloaded public health and aged care system". He also said "This is the kind of tragic short-term thinking people are so sick of – cutting over half of the respite beds in the ACT, with no current plan to replace them. This decision has to be reversed". "He also said that he was challenging both the labour representatives the incumbents here in the ACT. When our voice on this matters to our Community, you can't go missing in action on something like this, and to the Liberals, take a bit of time out of the Canberra bashing and actually do something for our Community, and commit to 1.7 million dollars to keep Burrangiri open".

Furthermore, Fiona Carrick MLA, said when she visited Burrangiri, " Burrangiri is an invaluable service to the community. People love it. We would like to see the two levels of Government and the Commonwealth Government, have conversations about how funding could be spread across Canberra and to keep Burrangiri open.

Additionally, as a family we are also aware that the Labour Government prior to the May, 2025 election committed to \$10 Million Dollars for Aged Care respite beds in Canberra. As individuals, we now want answers on how the Government propose to allocate those funds moving forward. Wouldn't it be within everyone's best interests to do what David Pocock suggested prior to the election, and that is simply "Do something for our community and commit to 1.7 Million Dollars to keep Burrangiri open".

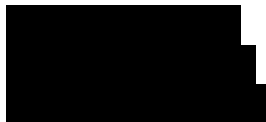
As a family, we would also further suggest for the Government to commit to additional funds in order to keep Burrangiri open until such time that a "purpose fit facility" can be built, if that is what the Health Minister wants. That way we will all have certainty moving forward that we can secure the much needed ongoing day/overnight respite that our vulnerable members of our community require, in a very timely manner. In turn, that will also secure certainty for existing staff that they will no longer lose their jobs, jobs that some have had in excess of 25-30 years, and for some staff who are nearly at retirement age to expect them to now secure a new role at their age is extremely distressing for them.

To conclude, it is only fair that I use a Person centred approach with Joan who is at the ripe old age of 101 to ensure that she gets the last say in relation to the above, and that is: *"I would be very distressed if you close Burrangiri down, because where would all the people go. They don't qualify for Hospital, and they can't stay at home by themselves, and if they can't secure timely respite, they along with their carers will all end up in Hospital. So wake up to the necessity, and just keep Burrangiri open".*

Please note, that I would also be willing to make a presentation to the public hearings on Friday 23 May 2025.

Yours Sincerely,

Ruth Carter

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.

