

TABLING STATEMENT

for the

Government Response

to the

The Standing Committee on Health, Report No.9
The Allied Health Care Needs of People in Residential Aged Care

Presented by Simon Corbell MLA
Minister for Health
February 2005

Mr Speaker, Chief Minister, and members of the Assembly.
I am pleased to table today the Government Response to the Standing Committee on Health Report on the *Allied Health Care Needs of People in Residential Aged Care*.

As you are all aware, the Standing Committee released the Report in August 2004. The report resulted from an inquiry into difficulties faced by older people in receiving adequate allied health services and care.

The Report covered the major issues raised in submissions to the inquiry, which were:

- the impact of access to allied health care services on the longevity and comfort of those in residential aged care;
- access to and the cost of transport to allied health treatments;
- the consistency in treatment provided in residential aged care facilities; and
- the need for mobile allied health services.

The Government has assessed the Report and the recommendations put forward. Recommendation 1 is noted, the first part of recommendation 2 is agreed to in principle, and the second part of recommendation 2 is noted.

The recommendations focus on:

- the Government investigating the occurrence of retribution in aged care facilities, and the need for policies to ensure complaints about aged care facilities can be made safely; and
- undertaking a survey of allied health services provided in aged care facilities, and developing an older persons health action plan aimed at improving access to allied health care services.

The Government shares the concerns raised by the Committee about possible retribution and making safe complaints, however it does not have responsibility for funding, standards and operation of residential aged care facilities. This is the responsibility of the Australian Government, and the ACT Government will work with the Australian Government to develop approaches to respond to the issues raised in this recommendation.

The Australian Government has established the Aged Care Complaints Resolution Scheme (ACCRS) for residents of residential aged care facilities and the community in general, to make complaints about residential aged care facilities, and strengthening this Scheme may be one response.

In the event that a complaint is made, the *Community and Health Services Complaints Act 1994* provides for complaints to be made about services for aged people. These services are defined to include services provided in association with the use of premises for the care, treatment or accommodation of aged people.

This is another complaints mechanism that residents of aged care facilities can use in addition to the Aged Care Complaints Resolution Scheme (ACCRS).

The second recommendation focuses on conduct of a survey of allied health use by residential aged care residents and an older person's health action plan.

The ACT Government currently provides a wide range of health services to all sections of the community, individuals, families and groups with special needs, including people in residential aged care.

Residents of residential aged care facilities are also able to access the full range of hospital services according to clinical need in line with arrangements for other members of the ACT Community.

The ACT Government is implementing a range of strategies to improve services for older people in ACT hospitals.

These include the establishment of a sub-acute facility to provide additional rehabilitation, convalescent and psycho-geriatric services, and clinical decision units collocated within hospital emergency departments to improve assessment and management of older people attending Emergency Departments.

Despite the current ACT Government initiatives the issue of service access is an issue for residents of aged care facilities. However, conduct of a comprehensive survey would entail a significant investment in time, energy and resources from aged care providers, and their cooperation would be essential if the survey was to be effective.

The interest among aged care providers in participating in a survey is unclear, and there may be other ways to identify gaps in service access. The ACT Government will approach aged care providers to discuss interest in a possible survey and to consider other approaches to identifying and responding to service gaps.

In relation to an older person's health action plan, there are currently a number of plans developed by the ACT Government that address the needs of older Canberrans.

The *Health Action Plan* recognises that increasing numbers of older people will seek access to health care and related services, as well as activities and services aimed at maintaining physical and mental health and well being, and supports the positive and healthy ageing of the ACT community.

The *Canberra Social Plan* sets the improvement of the health and well-being of the ACT community as a priority area. A primary goal is to meet the health needs of the ageing population, including establishing innovative aged health care and accommodation initiatives that recognise changing demographic profiles.

ACT Health is also currently preparing a Clinical Services Plan and a Primary Care Strategy, both of which will address the needs of older people using the ACT's services, as well as strategies to maintain the health of older people.

Together, these documents will provide a comprehensive response to the health needs of all ACT residents, including older people.

I commend the Government response to the Standing Committee on Health Report on the *Allied Health Care Needs of People in Residential Aged Care* to Members of the Assembly.

THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

Government Response

to the

The Standing Committee on Health, Report No.9
The Allied Health Care Needs of People in Residential Aged Care

Circulated by authority of Simon Corbell MLA
Minister for Health
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Standing Committee on Health The Allied Health Care Needs of People in Residential Aged Care

RECOMMENDATION 1

2.38 The Committee recommends that the Government investigate the occurrence of retribution in aged care facilities.

2.39 The Committee further recommends that policies relating to consumer protection, advocacy and complaints in aged care facilities ensure that residents are able to make complaints safely.

Government Response:

Noted.

The Australian Government has established a mechanism for residents of residential aged care facilities and the community in general, to make complaints about residential aged care facilities.

All Australian Government-funded residential aged care facilities are required to establish their own internal complaints handling mechanism. Residents, their relatives or representatives, can also contact the Aged Care Complaints Resolution Scheme (ACCRS), which has the capacity to deal with complaints confidentially and anonymously.

The complaint can be with regards to anything that affects a person who is, or was, receiving or eligible to receive aged care services. This may be a breach of the relevant approved provider's responsibilities under the *Aged Care Act 1997* or the Aged Care Principles, which the complainant regards as unfair or makes them dissatisfied with the service. The focus is on resolving the complaint with the main options being:

- bilateral negotiations where the complainant may not have any dealings with the service provider; and
- mediated negotiations where some face to face discussion between parties to the complaint are held.

If unresolved, a further option available is for the complaint to proceed to the Complaints Resolution Committee if negotiations have failed to achieve agreement.

The Commissioner for Complaints oversees and handles complaints about the ACCRS. If people are dissatisfied with how the ACCRS has dealt with a complaint, they are able to contact the Commissioner.

Given that the ACT Government does not have responsibility for funding, standards and operation of residential aged care facilities, the ACT Government does not currently have mechanisms to investigate the occurrence of retribution in any facility over which it had no responsibility, until such time as a complaint is made.

In the event that a complaint is made, the *Community and Health Services Complaints Act 1994* provides for complaints to be made about services for aged people. These services are defined to include services provided in association with the use of premises for the care, treatment or accommodation of aged people. This is another complaints mechanism that residents of aged care facilities can use in addition to the Aged Care Complaints Resolution Scheme (ACCRS).

The ACT Government shares the concerns raised by the Standing Committee and will ensure that the Australian Government and ACCRS are made aware of the concerns that were raised in submissions to the Standing Committee. Given that the Australian Government has in place the mechanisms require to investigate the occurrence of retribution, the ACT Government will work with the Australian Government to develop approaches to respond to the issues raised in this recommendation.

The issue of complaints relating to residential aged care was raised in the Legislative Assembly's Standing Committee on Health and Community Care Report Number 11, *Elder Abuse in the ACT*. The ACT Office for Ageing, Chief Minister's Department (CMD) are implementing a number actions, as an outcome of Report Number 11 and the ACT Government's response to Report Number 11. This includes the establishment of the Elder Abuse Information Line, which provides support, information and referral to services that may assist with abusive situations. This service is available to older people, their family, friends and others who are concerned about elder abuse. This line also assists service providers who work with older people who may be experiencing, or at risk of abuse. The service commenced on 18 June 2004.

Community education is also being provided for groups, organisations and professionals who wish to know more about elder abuse. Multi-lingual brochures about elder abuse are available in 15 languages.

RECOMMENDATION 2

3.4 The Committee recommends that the Government:

- **Undertake a comprehensive survey of all aged care providers to determine what allied health services are provided, by whom and at what cost.**

Government Response:

Agreed in principle.

As noted in the ACT Health submission to the Standing Committee on Health, ACT Community Health provides a wide range of health services to all sections of the community, individuals, families and groups with special needs, including people in residential aged care.

People in low level residential aged care can and do access community-based services. For people in residential aged care facilities who are unable to attend clinics, ACT Community Health provides the following services specifically targeted to residents in aged care facilities:

- dental services;
- diabetes services;
- occupational therapy;
- speech pathology;
- community nursing; and
- the Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT).

With regards to dental services, since the withdrawal of the Commonwealth Dental Health Scheme in 1996, ACT funding for dental health services has increased from \$4 million per annum in 1996/1997 to \$6 million per annum in 2002/2003, a fifty percent increase over a six-year period. In October 2003 the Senate Select Committee on Medicare recommended that the Australian Government commit funding to the restoration of the Commonwealth Dental Health Scheme. The ACT Government continues to lobby the Australian Government to recommence contributions to the Dental Health Scheme.

Conduct of a comprehensive survey would entail a significant investment in time and energy from aged care providers, and their cooperation would be essential if a survey was to be useful. The interest among aged care providers in participating in a survey is unclear, and there may be other ways to identify gaps in service access. The ACT Government will approach aged care providers to discuss interest in a possible survey and to consider other approaches to identifying and responding to service gaps.

- **Develop an older persons health action plan aimed at improving the accessibility of allied health care services which may include:**
 - **Options for mobile services.**
 - **Public/private/community service partnerships.**
 - **Coordinated volunteer transport service.**
 - **Coordinated social-work services available to all residents and potential residents.**
 - **Increased remuneration for allied health providers who deliver services in residences.**

Government Response:

Noted.

There are currently a number of plans developed by the ACT Government that address the needs of older Canberrans.

The *Health Action Plan* recognises that increasing numbers of older people will seek access to health care and related services, as well as activities and services aimed at maintaining physical and mental health and well being, as well as those that support the positive and healthy ageing of the ACT community. Priorities include:

- Focusing on approaches which maximise the fitness and wellness of older people and promote positive and healthy ageing, including people in aged care facilities, and examining the impact of potential loss of mobility and issues relating to social isolation and accessible transport.
- Ensuring that hospitals have sufficient capacity to provide quality care for older patients who are acutely ill.
- Increasing the level of nursing, allied health and community services to allow frail older people to remain living successfully within the community, and to return successfully to the community following hospital stays.
- Providing services for older people with challenging behaviours.
- Working with the Australian Government, the community, General Practitioners and government and non-government service providers, to undertake a 'collaboration' on ageing to improve programs and services for older people, including improved identification of the needs of older people and clarifying the responsibilities between agencies.

The *Canberra Social Plan* sets the improvement of the health and well-being of the ACT community as a priority area. A primary goal is to meet the health needs of the ageing population, including establishing innovative aged health care and accommodation initiatives that recognise changing demographic profiles.

ACT Health is also currently preparing a Clinical Services Plan and a Primary Care Strategy, both of which will address the needs of older people using the ACT's services, as well as strategies to maintain the health of older people. Together, these documents will provide a comprehensive response to the health needs of all ACT residents, including older people.

In 2004-05 the ACT Office for Ageing will be investigating programs and projects that can be implemented in the ACT to reduce the incidence of social isolation as part of the implementation of the Elder Abuse Prevention Project.

