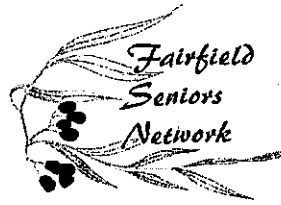


Submission
No 77

**INQUIRY INTO SERVICES PROVIDED OR FUNDED BY
THE DEPARTMENT OF AGEING, DISABILITY AND
HOME CARE**

Organisation: Fairfield City Council and Fairfield Seniors Network

Date received: 6/08/2010



**Submission from Fairfield City Council and
Fairfield Seniors Network to
The NSW Legislative Council Standing**

**In Response to
Services provided by the Department of Ageing,
Disability and Home Care**

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Background to Response

Response in Consultation with Fairfield Seniors Network

Fairfield City Council and the Fairfield Seniors Network welcome the initiative of the NSW Legislative Council Standing committee on social issues to seek individuals and organisations' comments on the quality, effectiveness and delivery of services funded by the Department of Ageing, disability and Home Care.

This response will express the point of view of leaders of senior's groups following a series of regular consultations as part of the seniors network regular meetings and to inform the Fairfield City council ageing Strategy. Also, recently two (2) consultations were held for the purpose of this response on Home and community services and Community Transport services.

The seniors consulted give their time and sometimes resources to make the lives of others better. As they face the years as frail older persons who will need community to care for themselves, they express comments such as:

“...they have loss status as they grow older and feel devalued by society. They also feel discriminated in many areas of community life and in addition, they feel that they suffer loss of many privileges that they used to enjoy during their working years. This has come as a surprise to many older people who believed they have earned the right to have a secure retirement after having worked hard, raised a family and paid taxes all their adult life, some seniors commenced work as teenagers and continued to work until retirement”. . Many feel “they deserve better after a life of contribution to society”. “

It is also worthwhile to give a brief profile of the Fairfield Seniors Network and the voluntary work that member provide for Council and their communities. In addition, it is also important to provide a quick overview of the city of Fairfield to understand more in depth the reality face by seniors living in this community in terms of disadvantage and ageing population. (Please see Fairfield Seniors Network and Fairfield City council's Profile attached).

Furthermore, the response will include comments from residents and workers who have attended forums to look at Home and Community Care services for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities and needs and consultations with Aged and Disabilities services to look at gaps and needs in Home and Community Care services.

1. Variation in Service Delivery, Waiting Lists and Program Quality of Home and Community Care services

1.1 Complexity and Accessibility of Services

Senior consulted, particularly members CALD backgrounds find the Home and Community Care Program too complex and fragmented to access, especially when they need more than one service at a time. Many times when they are helping a member of their community they need to call a few services to find what is needed. This means that the client would end up with a few services providers to deal with and a number of assessments and bills to pay. For people who have limited English it is very daunting and sometimes scary. Many wait until they are in crisis to look for help. Their first point of contact usually is their ethnic organizations which are low funded or run by volunteers. Many times, due to funding constraints, these organizations do not have the capacity to provide services. Many also said that they call their local Council for their good customer service and because Fairfield City Council has language aides.

1.2 Affordability of services

Fees are also a barrier to seek or continue with services. For example if they need to pay fees to a few different services such as domestic assistance and personal care from one organisation, Food services from Meals on Wheels, transport services from Community Transport and lawn mowing from Another organisation. There are many people in the community that prefer to go without services as they feel they could not afford to pay these fees or could not bring themselves to negotiate for services to lower their fees.

1.3 Safety of perception of safety

The issue of safety or perception of safety also plays another problem for seniors. They feel anxious about letting more than one person into their homes. Seniors prefer to have one person who speaks their language and understand their culture and to deal with an ethnic community organization for their care.

1.4 Central point of services and Meeting Places

Fairfield Seniors Network members felt that older people are feeling neglected as there are no government places where they can meet to socialise or find for information regarding aged care services. Most community centres and community halls that are accessible by public transport provide services for young people and women, while schools and childcares provide services for children. They rather talk to service providers face to face, particularly if they are unsure about their language proficiency. They feel weary about getting through the maze of questions and instructions needed to get to an operator when services use answering services by computers.

Also many groups do not have access to free meeting places. To use community facilities they need to be insured and incorporated. Insurances cost them from

\$1000 to \$2000 a year. Many groups are not covered by insurance and they take liability risks when they going on outings or held meetings in borrowed premises.

1.5 Long Waiting Lists for Home and Community Care services

In cases when they need urgent services, they commented that services have waiting lists or in the case of lawn mowing there are long waiting lists. They worry that when their houses look unkempt, it may invite vandalism and target to criminal acts against them, such as breaking and entering. This fear makes them feel unsafe.

1.6 Community Transport

While community transport is a great community service and gives users independency with particular needs, such as shopping, medical appointment or taking seniors to their groups, seniors may experience a number of problems, particularly around affordability.

Regarding fees, the experience is that when they need to attend medical treatment a few or several times a week, their budgets do not allow them to pay \$8 per trip on the pension. It is also very embarrassing for them if they need to come up with further expenses without notice or outside their budget as they may have to go without essential items. For example one of the seniors had to attend and specialist appointment and the Dr. had a long wait. The community transport driver needed to leave for other pickups, so Community Transport sent a taxi to pick up the client. The taxi driver charged the senior \$2 on top other the \$8 she paid to community transport. Whether it was the taxi driver who abused his position and the older person vulnerability, or a policy of Community Transport, the experience produced uncertainty in this senior about using Community Transport again for a while.

Also, they experience limitations when doing the fortnightly shopping trip, they are not able to take a shopping trolley and there is a limited amount of groceries they could carry themselves. Also there are limitations regarding time they need to do their shopping and maybe paying bills in one short trip.

2. Adequacy of complain handling and grievances mechanisms

Many seniors comment that they feel unable to complain as they feel that services may be affected if they do. However, when Community transport or other services come to the Fairfield Seniors Network to promote their services, seniors will raise issues as they feel empowered when they are among their peers. Many services take on board complains and concerns from residents, but ask for understanding from clients as they are usually overwhelmed by high demand for some services.

3. Flexibility in clients funding arrangements and client focused service delivery

At recent and previous consultations with CALD communities, one common theme keeps arising: The lack of funding to ethnic specific community organizations who have the ability and willingness to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate care to their ageing community. Seniors who attend day care centres often raise concerns about the inflexibility and inappropriateness of programs when services providers have a one fits-all approach to programs. There are many stories of ethnic groups providing programs and centre based meals for their elderly community with very little resources until volunteers become too ill to sustain their voluntary services. Some feel that with some support from the government they could keep a good level of support to their community for a long time.

The Polish Seniors' Group Story.

The Polish seniors group first migrated to Australia in the late 40's and early 50's. The community is rapidly ageing. In the early 80's a group of retirees started the Seniors Polish group. The group had a membership of more than 120 people who would get together in their own hall to share traditional meals and to have social and physical activities as well as dancing.

At the time they counted with about 25 to 30 volunteers who would cook and help older members.

With time government premises regulations and OH&S requirements become harder to comply with no funding or support. To date many of the initiators of the voluntary service has passed away or become too frail. The number of volunteers had dwindled.

Younger seniors who has taken on the task of continuing support the group and upgrade the hall are also ageing are wearing down while their health is deteriorating with the burden of keeping the group going and their hall viable.

Many times past and present group leaders who have also been part of the Fairfield Seniors Network have knocked on many doors looking for support but they have found little help.

Presently, the group is only supported by a handful of aging seniors with failing health, but they feel that with support from the government, younger member of the community would be willing to keep their community together.

Please see South West Sydney Ageing and Disability Forum Planning Grid – Identification of Prioities Needs and Gaps in Ageing and Disability Services for the region.

4. Fairfield City Council's Experience Regarding Home and Community Services

Fairfield City Council receives many daily calls from residents requesting information about Home and Community Services or they are under the impression that Council provides aged services. In addition, residents have reported that they have been referred back by aged service providers when the client request does not meet their criteria, particularly when people are looking for transport services, lawn mowing services and services for carers.

In our experience, the community has very little knowledge of local referral services such as the Commonwealth Carelink Centres or the Referral and Information Centre (RIC) formerly known as Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT).

Council has also received calls from many residents who have not found a positive response from the Commonwealth Carelink Centre. They consider Councils as resident friendly organisations from which, as ratepayers, they have a right to ask for services and information. In addition, Fairfield city Council has a pool of language aides who will help answer requests when the person speaks main community languages spoken in the local government area.

There is a need for Community Services within Council to constantly brief customer service officers on aged services and disability issues as well as a great amount of time devoted to give information and referral to residents by the Community Development - Aged and Disability Officer's Council position, whose brief involves only 5% to this area of work.

Furthermore, other branches of Council, dedicated to areas such as Waste, Open Space and Parks receive many calls requesting lawn mowing services. This take Council worker's from their own core business adding to their stress and to Council's resources.

Another issue that the ageing population put pressure on Council's resources is the lack of affordable community facilities dedicated to Older people. Fairfield City Council owns, managed and support three (3) Seniors Citizen centres built in the 70s with support with the then existing seniors groups. These centres are fully occupied at the moment. Presently it has around 50 formal and informal seniors groups. They compete for use of existing hall facilities. These facilities are generic and their use request groups to pay a small fee, set up tables and chairs. In Addition, groups need to be covered by public liability insurance as part of their duty of care as regulations are very strict regarding OH&S issues. Unfortunately, council could not overlook regulations and it not in a position to accommodate all its existing seniors groups I the area.

As alternative, seniors in the area meet at shopping malls or local clubs, whose main revenue are poker machines. At these places they can buy cheap meals, get free transport (courtesy buses) but don't find a friendly atmosphere. Many ethnic communities would not go to these clubs as they don't agree with the gambling at those places. The lack of alternative venue may even be a contributing factor to the level of gambling in some communities.

Recommendations:

- That the service provision be coordinated with case management approach, particularly for complex cases.
- That more culturally and linguistically appropriate care services be provided to seniors needing more than one service.
- That multiple fees for services be reviewed.
- That funding is awarded to local organizations that have links with local communities, particularly those who provide to culturally sensitive and language specific services.
- That services be consolidated into a *One or several Stop Shop Centres* that have a holistic approach to services, health focus and depression prevention.
- That strategies be developed to address issues affecting services with long waiting lists. For example, convert gardens into low maintenance gardens.
- That regulating bodies visit existing groups and listen to their grievances and complaints on a regular basis, or develop questionnaires to supplement existing complain mechanisms.
- That funding consideration be given to organisations who are willing to take care of their culturally diverse communities. be given
- That the Commonwealth Carelink Centres develop strategies to inform the community about their services and evaluation of the strategies be transparent and ongoing.
- That the local Commonwealth Carelink Centre employ bilingual information and referral officers.
- That the relevant department that will manage the Home and Community Care Program fund Councils to provide information and referral to local residents.
- That the relevant department funds Fairfield City Council brokerage money to employ bilingual information and referral officers.
- That capita funding be allocated to areas where there are a high number of older people who want to stay engage in the community and meet regularly.

Attachment 1

Fairfield Seniors Network's Profile

The Fairfield Seniors Network (FSN) is a volunteer group of seniors from diverse backgrounds and different suburbs of the Local Government Area. These seniors support their groups in different activities as well as emotionally to break isolation and to educate them about issues affecting them. The senior leaders from Cultural and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds (CALD) also educate their members about the Australian System.

The group has been working on local issues for about 15 years and has organised many local events, activities and capacity building programs for senior leader, which have gained considerable support from the local senior community with the support and sponsorship of Fairfield City Council and collaboration from a few local community organisations.

The FSN has a high number of CALD background participants. The network comprised of approximately 25 to 30 active senior leaders or groups representatives and a few community workers working on aged issues. These leaders facilitate and represent groups of seniors ranging in size from approximately 20 to 150 members per group. This is a member base of approximately 1,500 older people. One of the main roles of these leaders within the FSN is to disseminate information gathered at the network to their members in their own language. This network provides a vital link with seniors groups in the local area. The FSN meets monthly to share important information and knowledge and to discuss issues affecting senior leaders in the area. It also provides an opportunity for the senior community to channel information to workers supporting the network about their needs, concerns and preferences for the coordination of major activities for the area.

The FSN is supported by an Executive Committee formed by workers from Fairfield City Council, Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre, The Heights Community Services - Mt Pritchard, The Parks Community Network and NSW SLASA with attendance from other main community organisations in the area. Workers from these organisations co-convene meetings and assist in achieving the desired outcomes of the network. Lately, Community First Step's Recreational Aged Worker has joined the FSN Executive Committee.

Attachment 2

Fairfield City Profile

Fairfield City is located 32 kilometres south-west of the Sydney Central Business District and covers an area of more than 104 square kilometres, incorporating 27 suburbs.

Fairfield City's population is characterised by a high degree of ethnic diversity, with 52.5% of the population born overseas in 133 countries. The cultural variety is the most outstanding feature of Fairfield City and is reflected in the City motto "Celebrating Diversity". Fairfield City had the third highest *number* of residents who were overseas born (after Brisbane and the Gold Coast).

While Fairfield LGA has a comparatively young population with many young families, the greatest growth is occurring in the number of older residents, those aged 65 years or more. According to the 2006 census there were 20,082 persons over 65. This age group makes up approximately 9.9% of the city's total population. It is projected that by 2012 there will be over 25,500 persons over 65. this is significantly greater than for Greater Sydney and NSW.

Income levels are generally low for local residents. In 2001, the median individual annual income was \$14,660 (or \$282 per week) and the median weekly family income was \$811, representing some of the lowest incomes in Sydney. Fairfield LGA also demonstrates the some of the highest unemployment rates (12.7% of the total population) in the Sydney metropolitan areas. This is almost double the rate for the rest of Sydney, at 7.9% in December 2005.

The Fairfield Seniors Network welcomes the initiative of the Senate to look into the cost of living pressures on older Australians. It also welcomes the initiative to hold a public hearing on the issue. The Fairfield Seniors Network will welcome an invitation to one or more of its members to give evidence at the public hearings.

Attachement 3

South West Sydney Ageing and Disability Forum Planning Grid – Identification of
Priorities Needs and Gaps in Ageing and Disability Services for the region.