

Roadmap to healthy ageing vital for all our futures

Community service agencies of the Uniting Church make up one of the largest aged care provider networks in the country, with some 200 residential aged care facilities operating around 15,000 aged care beds. It also delivers care and support for thousands of older people who live in their own homes. In total, UnitingCare agencies are responsible for about 10% of community –based and residential services nationally.

UnitingCare Australia National Director Claerwen Little thinks most of us give little thought to ageing.

‘In their later years, some people may think about their financial future, but few consider and plan how they expect to live in their 70s, 80s, 90s and beyond. And people aged 100 years or more are in the fastest growing age demographic in Australia,’ Claerwen said.

‘With the number of people in Australia aged 65 and over expected to reach 25% of the population by 2047, and with an even greater increase in those aged 85 years plus, it is vital that the community at large, not just those accessing and working in the aged care sector, contribute to a culture of healthy and active ageing.

‘This includes thinking about and challenging our stereotypes and myths about what ‘old age’ means. As many of us get older our capacities *may* change, but none of us wants to become defined by these changes.’

The Government recognises there is a need to ensure that aged care services respond to the changing needs of this cohort, and asked the Aged Care Sector Committee to develop a document advising on future directions for aged care.

The community service agencies of the Uniting Church played a significant role in the [Aged Care Roadmap](#) and is strongly committed to its principles. The Roadmap sets out a pathway of reform where people are valued and respected, including their rights to choice, dignity, safety and quality of life. It proposes universal access to quality, affordable care and support services through a consumer-driven, market-based, sustainable aged care system, with a defined gateway to improve and simplify access to information and aged care services.

Claerwen said one of the Roadmap’s objectives is that consumers, their families and their carers should become proactive in preparing for their future care needs and give more focus to their choices as it impacts on their quality of life.

‘The Roadmap has summarised important reforms that have been successfully implemented. Others are to be implemented in the next year or two. We trust it will give policy and community direction to support individual choices and needs in a sustainable service system. It will involve developing different service models and new ways of working with older individuals over time.

‘At the moment, the complexity of the current system and the changes due to aged care reform make it difficult for many people, irrespective of age, to understand, plan for and access aged care when they need it.

‘Our observation is that people do not try to find out about the aged care service system while they are relatively healthy and independent. This means they may miss the benefit of information and support that can enhance their experiences of ageing and help them plan well in advance for services they may need in the future.’

Claerwen said it is important to have improved access to useful information from which individuals can choose services to work with them to sustain their quality of life.

Resthaven CEO Richard Hearn, who is also Chair of the UnitingCare Australia Aged Care Network (and member of the UnitingCare Australia National Committee), said the network has a major goal in promoting positive and healthy ageing.

'This is something I am passionate about. Positive ageing is a term which helps counter narrow stereotypes that suggest the ageing experience is negative and passive.'

Richard said the reality is that ageing brings many positive opportunities for older people to continue to contribute.

'Taking personal responsibility for improving health, leading active lives and continuing to engage with the local community are related aspects of healthy ageing.

'Every day examples of positive ageing are featured in a recent film project that Resthaven undertook in collaboration with the City of Unley. The *Unley Legends* film series showcases the importance of older people helping each other – some in small ways and others more generously. All are significant to community and family.'

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cteZenfQn6w>)

Richard said we need to remember ageing is not a single trajectory.

'Each person has a unique journey. Many have few hiccups, others live with lifetime limitations.

'There are actions many individuals can take to maintain capacity, autonomy and dignity and remain active in their community. If people stay healthy and positive as they age, they will likely have the choice to stay in their home for longer, and home is often the place they feel most comfortable and that holds important memories.

Richard said that in the current environment, a critical aspect of reform that requires greater political might is deregulation of the supply of Home Care packages to ensure access to services when and where needed.

'This will avoid premature entry to residential aged care and also hospitals.

'We are not there yet, but our new national wait list is reminding many of the huge unmet need in Australia.'

Richard said that Resthaven seeks to incorporate self-management and restorative elements when working with individuals to assist them to maintain their independence, including those with chronic degenerative conditions. The elements are tailored to best suit individual circumstances and are co-designed with the person to meet their specific requirements.

'Throughout metropolitan Adelaide and in regional communities, Resthaven works together with older people and their carers to support them to maintain independence and quality in their daily lives.

'Resthaven also contributes to the community through supporting research, innovation and in links with the tertiary sector, encouraging students to consider work in aged care.

'We share these endeavours with many like-minded UnitingCare network services, and other respected services working with individuals. This is important work. It is good.'

The aged care reforms aim to ensure this good work that responds to an individual's need and choice and their quality of life continues.

'We believe these are important leadership aspects of the aged care reform program in developing a sustainable service system.'

Australia is at a pivotal time in aged care reform. The pending outcomes of the Aged Care legislative review and the anticipated, reviewed *Aged Care Roadmap*, have prompted the Uniting Church's network of community services to look ahead and continually review its business models to ensure they reflect the needs and wants of an ageing Australian population that wants to age in a healthy and positive way.

Pictured: Claerwen Little with Richard Hearn; Rev Elwyn Penna chatting with Shirley Kanally; Noreen Bray at choir practice.