Position Statement

Ageing in Australia

Anglicare Australia believes that everybody has the right to dignity and quality of life as they age. We must all commit to a continuum of care, where everybody can get the support they need in a way that suits them. We also believe that old age itself is not a disability or medical condition. If we want to be a community that truly values its elders, then we must focus on promoting wellbeing and ensuring that we all enjoy a rich and full life as we age.

Our Experience

Anglicare Australia Network members assist the elderly through services including financial counselling, emergency relief, housing and homelessness, and community-based mental health programs. We also provide community-based and residential aged care services to more than 62,000 elderly Australians, employing 9,000 staff and drawing on more than 3,000 volunteers.

Our experience shows us that there is work to do as a society to ensure that our later years are valued. Too many older people are enduring lonely, isolated and precarious lives, sometimes including experiences of abuse, because they have are not included, valued or properly supported.

Key Issues

A Australia's population is ageing, challenging us to reflect on how well we include the aged in our communities. It is also clear that we must ensure a standard of care that meets our expectations as we and our loved ones grow older.

For Australians on low incomes, there are extra barriers to living a dignified life in old age. Many issues that affect all Australians on low income continue to negatively affect older people. Three key issues stand out and are closely intertwined in determining the quality of life of elderly Australians –income, housing, and social connectedness. These are particularly important issues for older people who also are members of marginalised groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, people with a disability, and older migrants.

Many Australians face retirement without enough savings or assets, meaning they will rely entirely on the Aged Pension. This particularly affects older women, and is reflected in their increased rates of homelessness. Many women will retire with less because of time taken out of the workforce, lower pay, and the impact of life crises such as family breakdown or domestic violence. All of this can lead to women losing assets and income, making them much more likely to retire into poverty.

Home ownership has become a major factor in creating a comfortable and dignified retirement. The Aged Pension is inadequate for people renting a home in the private market, leaving many pensioners in poverty. There is also a shortage of affordable housing which is suitable for older people as they become frailer or less mobile. Without the right housing, and with no opportunity to adapt it, it is much harder for people to stay safely in their homes.

Older people on low incomes are more likely to be in single person households and suffer from social isolation and exclusion. Anglicare Sydney's recent report Going it Alone shows that many older people on low income, particularly women, living alone are suffering from social isolation. There is a strong link between social isolation and disadvantage, which can lead to physical and mental health issues including disability, higher rates of food insecurity, and poorer housing.

Our aged care system is failing far too many people. Care is under-funded and there are not enough services for those who need them, especially in rural and remote Australia. Many older people cannot have their wish to stay in their home until they pass away honoured. Furthermore, our residential care models do not properly address the complex health needs of older people who come into care. This means that opportunities to improve people's lives, rather than just manage their decline, are being missed.

It is clear that the community expects quality Aged Care. That leaves us with a responsibility to fund that care. We rely too much on unpaid carers, often elderly themselves, to keep people connected and cared for. And government funding does not properly value those who work in aged care, even though we know we need to attract many more people into this area of work. Without action, those who work in aged care could become a new class of working poor.

Recommended Actions

Anglicare Australia calls for:

- All government income payments to be raised so that older people can live dignified, healthy and happy lives
- Social and public housing that meets the location and design needs of older people
- Funding and support for community-based initiatives that build social connection and inclusion for older people
- A legislated standard of aged care for everyone who is eligible for care, regardless of their capacity to pay or where they live. These standards must be properly funded
- An aged care system that offers a continuum of care right up to the end of life
- An aged care workforce that is properly paid, valued, and has access to career pathways. This workforce must be able to meet our needs, including those in rural, regional and remote Australia.

Anglicare Australia
in every Community