

## **Does Council Care Community Forum on Aged Care 14 August 2018**

Welcome to the Does Council Care Community Forum on Aged Care. My name is Dr Sarah Russell and I have been invited to facilitate this meeting.

I wish to acknowledge the people of the Kulin Nations on whose land we are gathered tonight and whose land was never ceded. I pay my respects to their Elders, past and present.

I also pay my respects to Elders from other communities who are here tonight.

My role this evening is to introduce our 3 speakers – Anne Leamonth, David Beckley and Rob Watts. My other jobs are to time-keep (with my bell) and then to facilitate a discussion with you all.

This meeting has been arranged for one purpose and one purpose only: To ensure Darebin council continues to provide high quality services for older people who live in our community.

Members of Does Council Care are fundamentally opposed to both the privatisation and marketisation of human services.

A few months ago, Robin Vote contacted me to express her concern about the council's plans for aged care services in Darebin. We owe Robin our sincere thanks. Without Robin, we would not all be here tonight.

To tell you just a little bit about me: I am a local public health researcher who has lived in Northcote for 35 years. All my research focuses on the so-called "consumer perspective". My recent work, for example, focussed on residents and relatives' views of residential aged care. I am currently exploring staff's experiences working in an aged care home and investigating the views of older people who receive home care services.

Before I introduce our speakers, I have been asked to give a brief history of aged care in Darebin and to explain some of the changes that are on the horizon.

In 1984, over 30 years ago, both the Federal and State governments implemented the Home and Community Care program, known as the HACC program. The program was embraced and also co-funded by Darebin council. In addition to the money it receives from government, our council allocates approximately \$6 million per year of ratepayers' money towards the provision of local aged care services. It does this because it values older people in our community.

As a result of this commitment to delivering aged care services, Darebin Council has developed a strong reputation of high standards of home care for elders in our community. The council employs highly trained, caring and competent staff to provide an invaluable service to older people in our community.

In 2013, The Gillard ALP government introduced the *Living Longer Living Better* aged care reforms. These reforms were motivated by forecasts for a burgeoning

ageing population and concerns – and quite legitimate concerns - about how the government could afford to provide services for older people in years to come.

These bipartisan reforms have encouraged private aged care providers to enter what government bureaucrats call the “aged care market place”.

Soon after these reforms were legislated, the Liberal and National Party won the federal election – and they have forged ahead with gusto to implement the reforms.

The federal Department of Health is clear about where these reforms are headed. They envisage a future where the aged care system is both market-based and less regulated.

This terrifies me.

The most important thing tonight is not to specifically discuss the Federal Government’s terrifying vision but instead to discuss how the aged care reforms affect Darebin Council and its residents. Also, we are here to discuss what the Council can do to continue to provide high quality care to older residents in this new federally imposed “competitive” environment.

From a financial perspective: Darebin Council currently receives what is called “block funding” from the government. This means the council is given an amount of money and they then decided how to spend this money on services for older people.

This system works extremely well. But it is going to change. We just don’t know when it is going to change.

The Federal Government has made a commitment to continue to provide block funding until 2020. After that, who knows? This block funding may continue until at least 2025, but no one, not even those who work in Health Department, knows.

Irrespective of whether the block funding continues to 2020 or 2025, I commend Darebin Council for making plans for the future. I encourage them to seriously consider not only continuing to provide home care services under the Commonwealth Home Support Program but to expand their services by becoming a provider of Home Care Packages.

Let me explain some of the changes in slightly more detail.

Firstly, the Federal Government has introduced a streamlined service for ALL aged care services. This streamlined service is called MyAgedCare.

The Darebin Council had no choice. If the Council is to continue to provide services to older people, all their current and future clients needed to be transferred to MyAgedCare.

I know some residents are upset about being transferred to MyAgedCare. But the Council had no choice but to comply with the new streamlined system. All people

over 65 who receive council aged care services were transferred, for better or worse, to MyAgedCare.

I've heard many people say it's "for worse".

To be fair: There are often problems when a government introduces a new large infrastructure. MyAgedCare is no exception. The Commonwealth Health Department is trying to fix these problems. The recent federal budget allocated \$60 Million to make MyAgedCare easier to use.

The next reform introduced by the Federal Government is a concept called "Consumer Directed Care". Unfortunately there is much confusion about what Consumer Directed Care means. Many people think consumer directed care is consumer centred care. And it's not.

Let's take consumer centred care first. I need to be clear. I don't use the word "consumer" in aged care. Consumer implies an economic transaction. I don't consider aged care primarily an economic transaction.

In my opinion, you are a consumer when you buy a pair of shoes or a cup of coffee – you can choose the shop, and the type of shoes/coffee you purchase. This is an economic transaction.

Older people who receive aged care services are often described as "aged care consumers" (e.g. COTA, National Seniors). Some claim this language positions older people as active participants in an economic transaction – that is, purchasing aged care services. I claim, on the other hand, the trend to use economic market-based terms is creating an environment in which the older person is being de-humanised.

I call consumer-centred care "person-centred care". Person-centred care is a good thing. Older people have the opportunity to actively participate in their own care in cooperation with those who provide the care – whether it be someone who helps with their meals or assisting them to shower. I fully support person-centred care.

Consumer directed care is a completely different concept. Consumer directed care describes a model of financing service delivery. It puts individuals in charge of their own funding rather than the provider. Individuals can choose to purchase Council Services or Private Services.

Some councils have decided they will not be able to compete with Private Providers. So they have decided not to continue to provide aged care services. Darebin Council has appointed an expert panel to help them decide what to do.

Personally, I would have preferred the Councillors to express strong support for continuing to provide services, like the Moonee Valley Council did.

Councillor Nicole Marshall was quoted in the Moonee Valley leader as saying she was sick of the provision of services being reduced to a dollar figure. She said: "I don't want to be a council that knows the price of everything but the value of

nothing". Nicole was unable to be here tonight. Instead, she, has provided us with a statement:

*Moonee Valley Council recently decided, against officer recommendation, to continue providing aged care services. Make no mistake, this decision was a barometer of the values of our Council. Too often, the discussion around service provision is reduced to a simple financial equation, failing to adequately consider the real value in having Councils remain as providers. Our aged care workers are valued and often loved by their clients. Our older residents and their families know there is a peace of mind that comes with having a highly trained Council employee provide aged care services for them or their family member. There are numerous examples of personal service outsourcing failing miserably, of the quest for profit and financial goals diminishing the care and respect that our older community members so deserve. Councils are the safe hands, the trusted providers driven not by the return to their shareholders but by the desire to ensure our older residents have the best care possible. For most Councils, this is not an issue of rate capping or affordability. It is simply a matter of priorities. I hope that your Council chooses its priorities wisely. I wish you all the best in your campaign.*

Cathy Henderson, General Manager of Darebin's Community Services, also offered to speak briefly tonight. The organisers decided this was a Community Forum for members of the community to speak and for council management staff to listen.

Before I introduce the speakers, I notice a Darebin Councillor in the audience. This is wonderful that you have come along to hear views from residents. However, I need to make it clear from the outset: I will not be taking any comments/questions from Councillors. Like Council management, you have many platforms in which to have your views heard. Residents don't.

Our first speaker tonight is Anne Learmonth. Anne has lived in Northcote for over 30 years. She has been an appointed member of Darebin Council's Active and Healthy Ageing Advisory Board for around 20 years.

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Before I introduce our 2<sup>nd</sup> speaker, it may be useful to explain the difference between 2 distinct government programs:

1. Commonwealth Home Support Program; and
2. Home Care Packages.

Commonwealth Home Support Program is the entry-level aged care services. Darebin Council is currently a provider of Commonwealth Home Support Program. This program delivers services such as:

- transport to appointments and activities (200 clients)
- domestic help (e.g. house cleaning, washing clothes, shopping) 2,500 clients
- personal care (e.g. help with showering or dressing) 600 clients
- home maintenance (e.g. changing light bulbs, gardening) & home modifications (e.g. getting a grab rail installed) 530 clients
- meals 400 clients
- social support and inclusion (Darebin has 29 Senior Citizen Clubs. Also 64 residents with low level dementia use Yanada house)

In today's Leader, Sue Wilkonson, CEO Darebin Council, claims the demand for domestic assistance has reduced. This needs to be put into context. The reduced demand for domestic assistance by Darebin council can be explained, in part, by the 5 hr limit per resident per week<sup>1</sup> imposed by the Commonwealth Home Support Program. This is less than was previously offered under HACC program.

Older residents who require higher-level care than those offered in the Commonwealth Home Support Program must now transition to Home Care Packages (Levels 1-4). Those people assessed as requiring a Home Care Package in Darebin must use a Private Provider because the Council does not provide Home Care Packages.

As I said earlier, I encourage the Council to consider increasing its services to older people by providing both Commonwealth Home Support Program and Home Care Packages.

The reason I am supportive of local council delivering home care is because older residents and their families value having a highly trained Council employees provide aged care services. Unlike private providers, council services for older people are not driven by the profit motive. Council staff have better working conditions which enables them to provide a much higher standard of care.

Our second speaker is David Beckley. David is an organiser for the Australian Services Union. The ASU is one of the largest unions in Australia. It represents workers who provide Council aged care services..

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Our final speaker tonight is Rob Watts. Rob is a Professor of in Social Science at RMIT. Rob is an expert in the impact of privatisation.

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<sup>1</sup> A participant at the forum contested the hours per week claiming it is 5 hours per fortnight. I have emailed Cathy Henderson asking her to clarify.