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978-0-521-49820-3 - Ageing and Social Policy in Australia

Edited by Allan Borowski, Sol Encel and Elizabeth Ozanne

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AGEING AND SOCIAL POLICY IN AUSTRALIA

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Preface

Brian Howe

Ageing and Social Policy in Australia marks a point of transition where, with a change of government, one would expect evaluation of past policies, some continuity in valuable policies and some consideration of new ideas. The importance of this book is that its sweep is wide, recognising that most economic and social policies impact on the aged and that therefore a comprehensive approach is justified.

The context is not lacking in controversy. The doomsayers are out in full force, no doubt encouraged by the prospect of a new government to convince, predicting a full-scale crisis perhaps leading to intergenerational warfare. I notice that Lester Thurow, in the United States, suggests that even capitalism itself could be threatened by the growth of a new, 'revolutionary class' of affluent, economically inactive elderly voters. The danger of such radical views is that they will get more currency than they deserve. Decisions will then be taken for political reasons and not based on careful and scholarly analysis.

These views are not new and have been effectively rebutted in the literature on ageing. Paul Johnson, who delivered the 1996 Downing Lecture at Melbourne University and has written frequently on this subject, used the occasion to express scepticism of such apocalyptic statements and discounted the possibility of intergenerational warfare in Britain or Australia.

Many of the authors in this volume refer to the various policy reviews that were initiated in aged care and social security as well as in health, housing and urban and regional programs of Labor governments from 1983 to 1990. The reviews were important because they gave the government a sense of the state of scholarship in a number of interrelated areas of policy as well as many recommendations for new policy directions. The reviews, which were all published, often provided a basis

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for widespread consultation with state governments as well as the community sector, including groups representing the aged. A transparent process also alerted other Commonwealth departments to opportunities to refine policy or to anticipate discussions that would ultimately be before Cabinet.

One of the messages in this volume which is spelled out for decision makers at all levels of government is the importance of lateral thinking, of looking for opportunities for cooperation across government departments and between spheres of government. The future is one of much greater fluidity in the way that services will be delivered to people. The institutional culture of the past is now changing so rapidly, and the clients of services increasingly expect to have more choice and more say in priorities. This will create many opportunities for the very old to manage their disabilities and to enjoy a good quality of life.

Of course there are dangers of which we need to be aware. The movement to community-based care will not succeed if there are not first class domiciliary services and they need to be provided with much greater certainty than exists at present. In many of the community service areas we have not provided programs on the basis of rights or entitlement, or both. Governments often have been too willing to take the benefit of savings from less costly institutions, and not to face up to the need to ensure that services are provided to meet the demand, particularly when it is justified on health grounds.

Reform, even substantial reform, is never complete or without the need for further reform. However, even more important is the need to widen our vision to look at policy issues from ever-broader perspectives. The emphasis on ill-health has often meant that programs for prevention have been starved of resources. The emphasis placed on crisis care has distracted us from a recognition that wellbeing flows mostly from factors that have to do with the quality of our community life.

We have only begun to see what this might mean for older people. Australia in the post-war period thought of itself as a young country and many of the services and facilities in communities were there to ensure young people lived active and interest-filled lives. As the proportion of the population that is over 65 grows then some of that focus will have to change. It won't be good enough to offer a hall for the senior citizens and membership of the bowls club. Older people will want to enjoy a much wider range of opportunities to go on working, learning, playing and living life to the full. This will require much more thought about the location of shopping centres, the accessibility of public transport and the construction of appropriate recreational and cultural facilities near to where people live.

As Paul Johnson said in his Downing Lecture, we should look at ageing

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as a positive achievement, reflecting higher living standards, best practice in health, less physical pressure in work. However, if people are to get the most out of their greater longevity we need to give new urgency to creating policies addressing positive ageing. This book is an important contribution to that goal.

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ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACAT	Aged Care Assessment Team
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ALRC	Australian Law Reform Commission
APHA	Aged Persons Homes Act (1954)
AURDR	Australian Urban and Regional Development Review
AWSS	Adult Wage Subsidy Scheme
BIMPR	Bureau of Immigration Multiculturalism and Population Research
BLMR	Bureau of Labour Market Research
CACP	Community Aged Care Package
CAM	Care Aggregated Module
CES	Commonwealth Employment Service
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
COP	Community Option Project
CSHA	Commonwealth–State Housing Agreement
DNCB	Domiciliary Nursing Care Benefit
EOT	Equal Opportunity Tribunal
EPAC	Economic Planning and Advisory Council
HACC	Home and Community Care Program
IADL	Instrumental Activity of Daily Living
IDC	International Disease Classification (WHO)
ILO	International Labour Office
LTU	Long-term Unemployment
MAA	Mature Age Allowance
MIP	Medicare Incentive Project
MWP	Mature Workers Program
NAPDC	National Action Plan for Dementia Care

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ABBREVIATIONS

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NCIYF	National Council for the International Year of the Family
NHS	National Housing Strategy
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
NESB	Non-English-speaking background
OMA	Office of Multicultural Affairs
OWN	Older Women's Network
RBL	Reasonable Benefit Limit
SAM	Standard Aggregated Module
SGC (SGL)	Superannuation Guarantee Charge (also known as the Superannuation Guarantee Levy)
SMH	<i>Sydney Morning Herald</i>
WHO	World Health Organisation