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To my mother and my father

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DIANE GIBSON

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Preface

We are rightly accustomed to seeing social problems as (variously) demographically driven; socially constructed; politically exacerbated. All that is true in trumps of the problem of ageing, as these chapters will show. What is equally true, however, is that *policy makes problems social*. My focus here, most broadly conceived, is on the ways in which personal troubles become public issues – and on the particular, often peculiar, construction put on those problems in their passage from the personal to the social.

Policy responses highlight some aspects of a problem, those to which they are particularly suited, while eclipsing others. The eclipsed aspects remain problematic, but those problems are then seen as the personal province of individuals and families concerned. Consider the themes introduced in Chapter 1, around which the book as a whole is organised: deinstitutionalisation, targeting, regulation, rights, dependency, feminisation. All of these themes point to particular ways of constructing issues raised by an ageing population, as well as to particular policy responses for dealing with them. But those policy responses, in doing what they do well, push back into the realm of 'personal troubles' those aspects of the problems with which those policies cannot cope well. In this process additional personal troubles may emerge; 'personal' problems which are socially constructed as part of a public solution to a 'social' problem.

No policy can do everything at once. Much though it may do in some dimensions, there are inevitably other dimensions along which it leaves much undone. Aaron Wildavsky (1979) used to talk of 'policy as its own cause', March and Olsen (1976) of policy-making as a 'garbage can' in which solutions look for problems at the same time as problems are looking for solutions. The peculiarity about policy areas like aged

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care is the way in which this process is interrupted, the way in which a residual category of 'personal troubles' soaks up aspects of the problems that constructions of social policy define as outside their own remit. In cases such as these, feedback processes are interrupted. Sociological circuit-breakers serve to interrupt ordinary processes of policy formation and reformation. The 'status quo' of existing policy can continue on its journey, critically appraised in its own terms, but with its destination largely unremarked. Policy is prevented from serving as its own cause.

Policy analysis, of the sort practised in Parts I and II of this book, is a necessary first step. The constructions which policy puts on social problems, the extent to which policy serves its self-defined tasks well or badly, are clearly important considerations. But theoretical reflection on aspects of the problem that those policies inevitably eclipse is an equally necessary next step, as Part III of this book goes on to show.

Any piece of social research must be properly situated. This one is firmly rooted in Australian experience. Throughout Parts I and II, I hope to speak both to Australians about their own aged care system and to bring the experience of Australia (a world leader in several respects, laggard in a few) to the attention of international and comparative analysts of social policy. Interesting though the peculiarities of Australian experiences may be, both to Australians and to comparativists, what is perhaps more striking is the commonality of perspectives on these problems and the commonality of policy responses across virtually all the developed and much of the developing world. Having been led to the broader theoretical reflections of Part III by reflection on Australian problems and practices, those reflections nonetheless apply with equal force to present ways of thinking about problems of ageing internationally.

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This book is the culmination of work on these topics spanning two decades. Although none of this book literally reprints any previous published work, my first and largest debt is inevitably to my many collaborators, co-authors and co-workers with whom I have worked on these ideas over the years. I ought to single out for particular tribute in this regard: Judith Allen, Fran Boyle, John Braithwaite, Valerie Braithwaite, Dorothy Broom, Warwick Bruen, Stephen Duckett, Ching Choi, Robert Goodin, Coralie Kingston, Zhibin Liu and Don Rowland. A more global vote of thanks will have to serve for the many more people who have influenced my thinking during our time together in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at the University of Queensland, in the School of Humanities at Griffith University and in the Ageing and the Family Project at the Research School of Social Sciences of the Australian National University.

I should also express my appreciation for the generous funding of a range of consultancies and research projects which have helped towards the development of many of the arguments presented here. The federal Department of Family Services and Health has, despite a bewildering series of name changes, been a consistent supporter of applied health and welfare research in Australia over the past two decades; without their funding of my own and others' work we would simply not have the national data and analysis so necessary to good policy development. While too many to name, I am grateful to many officers of that department for stimulating discussion, critical comment and various forms of assistance with tracking down necessary national data.

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of Health and Welfare; on the contrary, all the views expressed are insistently my own, and ought not be attributed to them as my present employers. Still, past and present members of my Aged Care Unit there – particularly Anne Jenkins, Sushma Mathur and Debra Rickwood – have contributed ideas and insights which have inevitably found their way into this book. For policy updates in Australian aged care, I would refer the reader to the 'Aged Care' chapter in the biennial report of the Institute, *Australia's Welfare* (Canberra: AIHW 1993, 1995 *et seq*.).

Earlier versions of some of these chapters have been discussed at various professional meetings, among them: the Research Committee on Ageing of the International Sociological Association, the Political Studies Association of the United Kingdom, The Australian Sociological Association and the Australian Association of Gerontology, and various seminars and conferences run by the Social Policy Research Centre of the University of New South Wales. I am grateful to all the commentators and questioners on all those occasions for helping me to sharpen my arguments.

After dozens and dozens of articles, book chapters and research reports, it was a rude shock to find oneself writing one's first single-authored book. Tim Barton, Rudolf Klein, Robin Means, Sid Sax, and various anonymous referees have all helped me to see the shape of the book. Phillipa McGuinness has been patient and persistent, a model editor. My partner, Bob Goodin, has been impatient and insistent (absent that, it would never have been written). I am grateful to them all.

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Abbreviations

AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
DCS	Department of Community Services
HACC	Home and Community Care
HFS	Department of Health and Family Services
HHCS	Department of Health, Housing and Community Services
HHLGS	Department of Health, Housing, Local Government and Community Services
RCI	Resident Classification Instrument

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