

National Roundtable on Social Isolation and Older People...What Works?

Monday 14 November 2011

Forum Notes

What are the key issues raised by our speakers?

Older Peoples Needs Have to be Identified Early

- It is important to keep people connected from an earlier stage rather than when their needs reach a crisis level by which point they are cut off from their friends, family and services.
- We need to plan for the future, but what will the issues be in the future?

Planning

- There needs to be better planning and prevention for the next generation but how do we do this at the same time as delivering services to an ageing population?
- How do local councils invest resources for ageing population?

Transport

- There are challenges posed by growth in cities and lack of infrastructure at the boundaries, this places a lot of importance on the private car
- There is too much red tape
- There are many issues of transport in rural areas and cities
- There needs to be reliable and interlinked public and community transport
- Funding for transport can be very difficult
- The possibility of volunteers assisting with local transport could help solve some of the transport issues

Services

- There is a need to improve services
- It's not always services that are a solution to social isolation; programs are better run for everyone with participants that need extra support given extra assistance

Activities

- Activities need to be driven by participants and grouped by common interests not by disability
- We need to create opportunities for people to form networks within networks

Collaboration

- How do we facilitate collaboration and share resources between organisations?

Housing

- There needs to be more affordable and safe housing for older people
- There needs to be more social housing that meets culturally specific needs

Engagement

- It is important to keep people engaged before they become older
- Engage older adults in planning and strategy development
- We need to become better listeners to them as individuals not just as a collective
- Steer away from what works for us as planners, operators and providers
- Don't assume one size fits all
- Older people should be encouraged to stay involved and keep active
- Older people are not clients, they are contributors to society

Invisibility of Older People

- Older people become invisible
- Older people want to be heard, how do we ensure they don't become invisible?
- The voice of older people is not heard well

Technology

- The internet can connect people but it might also isolate people

Ageism

- There is a need for different images of ageing
- Change the terminology of ageing
- We live in a youth focused culture

Intergenerational Opportunities

- An intergenerational focus is important and should be a big strategy
- We could try to take an intergenerational approach to learning
- We should encourage mentoring of older people with younger people

Community Connections

- How do we ensure community remain connected?
- A caring community rather than individual carers
- How do we construct informal and formal connections?

CALD Issues

- Having a limited ability to speak English as a second language can be a barrier to isolation/older life learning
- We need to connect with others from the same culture but also the broader community
- Older new migrants should be supported to join new groups (Cook Islands culture)

Personality Issues

- An individual may be embarrassed about having a disability

Buildings

- We need to build our physical structure to create opportunities for communal interaction

Storytelling

- Use storytelling as a mechanism to reduce social isolation
- There is a power in getting older people to write down their stories and sharing their wisdom and experience

Loss of Friends

- As people age they should try to replace loss of friends

What are the key opportunities for addressing social isolation and older people?

Technology

- Technology can help older people access information
- It can help people remain connected
- The impact of the 'digital computer' era has disadvantaged some older people Technology can keep people with mobility issues remain engaged
- Addressing the digital divide, we need to enable better opportunities for teaching, learning and engaging younger people as part of the programs. We should start with simply ways of learning
- Learning technology is a great means for getting people together and maintain social contact
- We should supply access to computers for low income/people with a disability
- Outreach services could introduce computer training into groups

Future Planning

- We need to look ahead and be open to change and keep up with the expectations of the upcoming generation with dialogue between the generations
- We should encourage people to think about what they want in retirement and plan for that now
- There needs to be better planning for the gateway into ageing
- Urban and building design should create interconnections. Common standards through planning provisions/MSS for Age Friendly Cities

Transport

- We need to invest in public and community transport
- There could be free public transport one day a week

Council

- There are community building opportunities in Council

Communication

- Develop simpler communication systems with older people
- There needs to be more engagement with older people

Stories

- Sharing stories is important, it transfer knowledge and wisdom down to the younger generations

Recognising Older People

- We need to better recognising what older people can contribute

Social Inclusion

- There needs to be better recognition of all that social inclusion offers – not just thinking 'it's nice'

Housing

- There needs to be more strategies for affordable, appropriate housing
- People living alone in big houses; are there opportunities to match students with these older people?

Identification

- We should create systems that identify those who are feeling isolated

Learning

- Keeping up with learning, not just technology but also the language and its meaning
- Promote education and learning

Language

- Addressing language barriers

CALD Issues

- Growth funding to support CALD groups

Prevention

- There should be a focus on prevention rather than care
- We should encourage older people not to get “old” but to stay active and engaged

Volunteers

- Using volunteer organisations such as Rotary and Lions to engage and provide one to one interactions for people who are socially isolated.
- Money needs to be invested into a volunteer coordinator
- Training volunteers is essential
- Government could encourage people to volunteer with older people

Intergenerational opportunities

- There are Intergenerational opportunities in schools
- Using public spaces to create intergenerational opportunities
- Create intergenerational opportunities that are not contrived and based on differences
- Be innovative with intergenerational interactions, for example build an aged care centre next to a school

Information

- There needs to be more advertising of what’s out there already
- We need better ways to find out about current services

What questions do we need to ask of our panel and each other?

- How do we start a community dialogue about these ageing issues?
- Peoples experience of the aged care system is happening at a time of crisis, how do we better prepare?
- What supports/backup can be offered to services with computer difficulties?
- How do we collaborate better to build, share and develop good models to overcome social isolation for older people?
- How can we better consult with older people about what they need?
- How do we get people to plan earlier?
- What is a concrete proposal for improving the transport issue?
- How do we reduce the amount of red tape around volunteering for community transport?
- How do we solve community transport coordination?
- If you were prime minister what would you do about the transport system?
- How do we engage the most disadvantaged?
- How to engage younger people to link in with older people?
- How can transport be more accessible to all people?
- How far off is a national housing policy for older people?
- How can we financially resource volunteer coordinators to ensure sustainability of programs?
- What assumptions do we need to challenge about what older people want?
- How does everybody deal with multiplicity of organisation and agencies?
- Do we reinvent or build on previous learning's?
- How do we achieve increased community access to things which older people have prioritised?
- To what extent can we assume there is a similar need amongst older people?
- How effective are communities in creating social connections?
- What is politically possible in policy?
- How will this information be communicated to communities, particularly CALD communities?
- How do I change the way I go about ageing?
- How do we challenge the ageist attitudes we have to identify solutions?
- How do solutions for rural and remote areas differ and what strategies have worked?
- What can we do to help our information better reach older people?
- To what extent do services act as a barrier to social connection other than a facilitator?
- How do you mobilise older people to push for change?
- What are some innovative ways to assist with program waiting lists?
- How do we support older homeless/marginalised individuals who have not been able to plan for retirement?

Issue Specific Discussions

Mental Health Issues amongst Older People

What really matters on the issue of mental health for socially isolated older people?

- There are multilayered things we can do to address mental health issues
- Increasing age/frailty/health and acceptance that this is ok
- There should be more emphasis on keeping mentally healthy
- Mental illness has a social stigma
- There is a high incidence of depression in aged care facilities and lack of awareness
- There needs to be more recognition of the issue
- Address the mental health issues that come with physical health issues
- Listen to the stories of their life narrative and learn to engage with people
- There needs to be a national approach to good mental health in older people
- The impact of mental health on carers can be socially isolating for them
- There needs to be a preventative, holistic approach to mental health issues
- Family violence and elder abuse needs more awareness

What needs to happen to make the changes you think are needed?

- Acknowledge and promote how multi-faceted mental health issues are
- Need holistic approach with training and education that not medication as first response
- Social connection should be part of the first assessment
- Informal social contacts can be helpful to talk through issues it doesn't always need formal counselling
- Improve training of workers in nursing homes and community care
- Separate "unhappiness" from "clinical depression"
- Listening to peoples stories
- Trust needs to be built up over time
- Volunteer visitors for people with a mental health illness
- There should be more training to recognise signs of mental illness
- A mental health first aid could be created
- Beyond blue are working on training for the aged care sector
- GPs need to be more alert to the issues of mental health, it is not normal to be depressed

What are the key statements you would like to release to the media today about this issue?

1. The third age is missing out
2. It is important to invest in education, building understanding in older people
3. More support around transition change
4. A more integrated approach between social support and GP services, the need to understand the dual role of both streams of service.

CALD Issues amongst Older People

What really matters on the issue of social isolation and older people from CALD backgrounds?

- People from CALD backgrounds are more isolated than other older people
- Language is a big barrier
- There is a lack of knowledge of where to go for help
- There are a lack of CALD services that can help senior CALD people
- There needs to be better provision of information and engagement with CALD communities
- People from CALD backgrounds have different levels of educational backgrounds
- There is a high level of fear in terms of dealing with a community/environment that doesn't speak their language or understand them
- There is a need for more funding towards emerging numbers of CALD people to attend social groups

What needs to happen to make the changes you think are needed?

- Announcements of funding allocations should be released using popular mediums for example ethnic media
- There should be active engagement using community meetings to announce what's available
- More information sessions in community languages
- More orally translated information because CALD seniors will more likely listen than read
- Funding should be available for more culturally specific driven projects, especially those that are informative, educational and empowering
- More funding to support innovative and creative ideas to improve life for CALD elderly people
- More support for new arrivals
- Not putting people in silos around ethnicity
- More partnership arrangements
- Break the myth that ethnic elderly only want to be serviced by 'their own'

Where are the opportunities to improve outcomes for socially isolated older people from CALD backgrounds?

- More opportunities for participation and sharing what was learned
- Local councils should play a more active role in providing opportunities for CALD seniors
- Connecting CALD seniors with people of their language groups
- More festivals that are cultural events
- Listening to the clients, there should be less admin work and more personalised services
- Create visual material for those who can't read to provide appropriate information
- Engaging volunteers to help those isolated
- There should be more consulting with the community groups about the involvement they want
- Give the older CALD people a change of responsible roles for example, educating the younger generations
- Recruiting bilingual workers and volunteers

- Education within communities – bilingual workers trained and educated on issues of aged care, general community education
- More resources towards informing communities about health services and aged care services
- Identifying community leaders
- Need for more funding to resource initiatives

What are the key statements you would like to bring back to the plenary about this issue?

1. Information needs to be accessible and appropriate, not in the top 15 of languages but in top 200 languages, this will lead to better access to services
2. There needs to be equitable partnerships
3. Projects needs to be properly resourced

Housing Issues amongst Older People

What really matters on the issues of housing for socially isolated older people?

- What you feel and what you see when you walk outside the front door
- Feeling secure
- Accessibility to services
- Services need to provide greater variety of housing opportunities with a wide spectrum to meet all needs
- At no stage in our lives do we ever mix with only one generation, so why are retirement villages so successful? Retirement villages give socially exclusive perception that there is no need to go beyond the "walls"

Other best practice examples of housing for older people:

- Williamstown Community Garden has developed through public housing tower and residents connect. It has been funded through "Well for Life". It has been successful in creating connections through small amounts of funding
- The Wintringham Model operates on a social inclusion model. It has a front porch area that is designed to allow people to be a part of the world
- Redland City Council, QLD provide a good kit for welcoming new residents. This council is a leader in QLD

What needs to be done to make the changes you think are needed?

- The Government could do more to build public housing
- The Government could increase the housing mix within complexes
- The Local government could meet with new residents to provide information about the neighbourhood and packets of info could be given to real estate agent for passing on to renters
- There needs to be a an increase in stock of affordable housing
- Incentives that promote the increase of the price of housing such as the first home owners grant should be removed
- Change the perception that all people need to own their own homes
- There needs to be some medium to high density housing
- Increase the diverse spectrum of housing to meeting the variety of needs
- Increase security in rental market
- There needs to be a coordinated approach to planning at all levels

What are the key statements you would like to release to the media today about this issue?

1. The government needs to increase the stock of affordable housing
2. There needs to be a diverse spectrum of housing to meet the variety of needs
3. Having a bipartism cross government planning at all levels

4. There needs to be early intervention and better pathways for support services to prevent homelessness

Transport Issues amongst Older People

What really matters on the issue of transport for socially isolated older people?

- Access
- Availability of transport
- Identify the need for transport
- Changing needs of people for transport
- Grey line between medical transport/community transport, there needs to be more clarity required on the purpose
- Type of transport available
- Timetables in rural areas are not suitable for older people
- Lack of flexibility in services
- We need to keep informed on review of taxi industry
- Scheduling of transport services outside of peak hours
- Reliability of public transport
- Safety and security

Where are the opportunities to improve transport outcomes for socially isolated older people?

- Eligibility for social isolation in HACC programs, is this clearly defined? What are the measures?
- Make social isolation an assessment measure
- More frequent stops for older people in non peak hour
- Solutions to reflect the community need
- Consult about local needs
- Promote what exists

What needs to happen to make the changes you think are needed?

- Identify what people want
- What market research is being conducted to identify potential customers who cannot access services?
- Identify models for transport planning
- More collaborative approaches by service providers
- Fewer fireworks new years eve and more money to improve transport solutions
- More clarification for tax issues for reimbursements to volunteers
- Partnerships between the public and private transport sector for promotion and scheduling
- Structured funding for transport services that complement the public transport
- Planning and infrastructure for public transport system ensuring that various forms connect
- Partnerships with taxi directorate for training of drivers
- Consultation with the services users

What are the key statements you would like to release to the media today about this issue?

1. Transport is a key issue in preventing social isolation
2. There needs to be a coordinated approach to transport solutions
3. Community transport working together with public transport needs to be better funded
4. There needs to be better community transport in rural area
5. We need to genuinely consulting with end users of transport
6. Future planning needs to take into account demographic change