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For immediate release

DON'T FORGET OUR OLDER AUSTRALIANS

The Uniting Church has called for a fresh policy debate around aged care in Australia to ensure quality of life and quality of care for older Australians.

Uniting Church President, Rev. Dr Dean Drayton, said politicians need to focus more on quality aged care which leads to a decent quality of life for older Australians.

“The strength of any nation is measured by how well it looks after its most vulnerable. The Uniting Church wants to make sure that the aged care debate is about more than bed numbers and staff ratios, but that it focuses primarily on ensuring access to quality care for older Australians - particularly those who are socially and economically disadvantaged,” Rev. Drayton said.

UnitingCare Australia National Director, Lin Hatfield Dodds, said funding levels, increased access to in-home care and better support for carers are all critical areas that need addressing by the incoming Government.

“Through our national network of caring agencies, UnitingCare provides services to over 18,000 Australians - 12 per cent of all aged care services in Australia.

“We know there is a significant need for more community care funding to meet the demands for respite care and in-home care for those who do not want to enter a nursing home,” she said.

“A commitment to improved funding must also include a specific commitment to improve the planning and integration of community care programs to avoid duplication and to ensure that services can be quickly and easily accessed by all.

“Policy must focus on the quality of care given to older Australians because research shows this directly impacts on the quality of life they experience. Funding must be sufficient to provide high quality person-focused care. At the moment current indexation arrangements for funding are not keeping up with the cost of providing care.

“In one UnitingCare agency for example, wages for staff rose between 7 and 18 per cent from 2002 to 2004 and other expenses like insurance and utilities rose by 15 per cent in the 2002/03 year. This current financial year the government has agreed to indexation totalling only 3.76 per cent.

“UnitingCare is committed to ensuring that access to aged care is based on need, not somebody's ability to pay. The current system often excludes the most disadvantaged and marginalised simply because they cannot pay a bond – whoever wins government must change this,” Ms Hatfield Dodds said.

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