



THE HON JUSTINE ELLIOT MP

Minister for Ageing

MEDIA RELEASE

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New national protocol: plan to look after elderly Australians living alone

A new national protocol for community care service providers has been proposed aimed at reducing the number of frail older Australians dying alone at home and reducing delays until deaths are discovered.

The protocol was put forward today by Federal Minister for Ageing Mrs Justine Elliot at the inaugural meeting of the Ministerial Conference on Ageing held on the NSW North Coast, bringing together the nation's ministers for ageing.

Some 783,000 (29 per cent) of people 65 years and older lived alone in private dwellings in 2006, with the percentage increasing to 39 per cent among those aged 85 years and over.

ABS projections (Series II) suggest that, by 2026, about 907,000 people aged 75 years and over will be living alone, most of them older women (685,600).

In NSW the State Coroner reportedly took custody of 299 decomposed or decomposing bodies in 2006 and 283 in 2007.

State and Territory Governments will consult on the draft protocol with an aim for it to be implemented in August 2008.

"Years ago, older generations had strong family support networks – but today's contemporary lifestyles and smaller family structures have changed this," Mrs Elliot said.

"Now, our older Australians often rely on informal support networks. We have to look at innovative ways to reduce social isolation.

"More than one million clients and carers use community care services each year.

"Providers of these services play an important role in ensuring that any unexpected changes in a client's circumstances are identified early and appropriate action is taken.

"While many providers have local protocols, if a client does not respond to a scheduled visit, they are not consistent or universally applied.

"The inaugural Ministerial Conference of Ageing will look at practical measures to ensure our older Australians remain connected to the community," Mrs Elliot said.

In addition, Mrs Elliot also announced a one-off allocation of \$4.2 million to 21 community organisations to support programs combating social isolation as well as providing emergency meals, shelter and clothing to frail older people.

The one off funding offers include:

- funding of up to \$500,000 to Anglicare Australia to provide services that support social re-engagement, including \$300,000 to undertake research and pilot projects that support participation of socially isolated older people in the community;
- funding of up to \$150,000 to the ACH Group to commence a program to address high level isolation amongst older people living in the community; and
- grants of up to \$500,000 to the Salvation Army, Uniting Care and the Benevolent Society.

Mrs Elliot said today that winter was a particularly hard time for many vulnerable older people in the community.

“Winter is a peak season for community care services to provide emergency assistance and this funding recognises the work of so many organisations working within the community,” Mrs Elliot said.

“The emphasis on social inclusion programs in these grants is in recognition of my concern for the plight of older frail people who are isolated in the community.

“It is important that we ensure the older members of our community are visible and not vulnerable,” Mrs Elliot said.

For more information, contact Mrs Elliot's office on (02) 6277 7280