



THE HON JUSTINE ELLIOT MP

Minister for Ageing

MEDIA RELEASE

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Australian First Solely Dedicated Care Farm to Assist People with Dementia

Minister for Ageing, Mrs Justine Elliot today officially opened Australia's first solely dedicated care farm to assist older Australians living with dementia.

Overseas research – particularly in the USA and Holland – has found that caring for pets and local-scale gardening has been found to improve a resident's physical and emotional health and assist with behavioural problems often associated with dementia.

The St Laurence Care Farm in Lara, Victoria is patterned on a Dutch model where people with dementia help with farming activities such as caring for animals and gardening.

There are more than 7,000 people in The Netherlands participating in more than 850 care farms there.

In the 1990s in the USA, nursing homes began to encourage residents to participate in the care of companion animals and gardening – rather than medication to respond to behavioural problems – known as the Eden Alternative.

The Department of Health and Ageing reports there are more than 20 residential aged care homes that operate with a similar approach to the Eden Alternative.

The Elizabeth Gates Village, Singleton NSW, recently gave a presentation at an Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency seminar on the way in which its farm had expanded and the impact it had had on the lives of residents in both the low care and high care homes.

“With Australians having one of the longest life expectancies in the world and an ageing population – the community must find new and innovative ways to respond to this challenge and the growing number of people with dementia,” Mrs Elliot said.

It is expected up to 650 clients cared for by St Laurence could benefit from the new Australian care farm.

The farm project is specifically for Costa House residents and other clients of St Laurence Community Services who have been diagnosed with dementia.

Across Australia there are 200,000 Australians affected by dementia including about one in four people aged 85 years and over. This is expected to double in the next 20 years.

“Through the farm environment, residents are given a valued role – caring for the farm’s garden and animals with assistance and supervision from staff and volunteers.

“This project involves caring for animals and tending flower, vegetable and herb gardens as well as an olive grove,” Mrs Elliot said.

The farm has been built for residents of Costa House, a 101-bed residential aged care home, and also for recipients of community care who have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease or other types of dementia.

St Laurence Care Farm is next to Costa House on the 42-acre site of the St Laurence Park Retirement Village.

Dementia initiatives

The Australian Government has committed more than \$120 million a year to the Dementia Initiative. This includes:

- \$89 million a year for Extended Aged Care at Home Dementia Packages that provide services to people with dementia in their own homes;
- \$24 million a year for dementia research, prevention, early intervention and improved care initiatives, including research grants offered through the National Health and Medical Research Council and funding for three Dementia Collaborative Research Centres and;
- \$7 million for training for aged and community care staff, carers and community workers including police.

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