



## **Senator the Hon Santo Santoro Minister for Ageing**

### **MEDIA RELEASE**

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#### **Support for older Australians in retirement villages**

The Minister for Ageing, Senator Santo Santoro, has confirmed the Howard Government's commitment to supporting older Australians in retirement villages during a speech to an industry conference on the Gold Coast today.

Senator Santoro used his address to the Retirement Villages Association Conference to articulate the Howard Government's strong preference for supporting older Australians to continue living in their communities and sleeping in their own beds.

He also announced a new measure which will extend the availability of Medicare rebates to residents of retirement villages.

Senator Santoro said the Howard Government had demonstrated its commitment to delivering aged care to older Australians in their own homes, and was keen to extend those services to residents of retirement villages.

A successful pilot program, which trialled the delivery of community care to 321 people in retirement villages, had opened the way for the expansion of community care in retirement villages.

"This includes both Community Aged Care packages, Extended Aged Care at Home (EACH) packages which provide services for people who are more frail and need more care, and EACH Dementia packages specifically for those with dementia," he said.

"The Howard Government has already provided \$24.2 million in funding to provide these services for people living in retirement villages.

"There is no reason why people who have invested in a lovely home in a retirement village should be discriminated against in terms of access to aged care services. They should not be forced to either go without care, or move into a residential facility, if they have an alternative.

"The Howard Government has put expanding community care at the forefront of our aged care strategy. Ten years ago there were less than 5,000 community aged care packages, now there are almost 8 times that number. In partnership with the retirement village sector, we aim and intend to expand that number greatly."

Senator Santoro encouraged developers and operators to consider co-locating aged care facilities with retirement villages to increase choice and to allow older people to continue living in the same place as their aged care needs change.

“There are a number of options for retirement village proprietors. They may choose to provide the services themselves – or simply to allow external providers to deliver the services within their villages.”

Senator Santoro also foreshadowed changes to eligibility rules covering Medicare benefits and GST exemption for residents of retirement villages who also received aged or medical care.

“Prior to acceptance into accommodation which includes a care component, retirement villages generally require applicants attend their GP to undergo an assessment of their health and ongoing care-needs. This assessment is used to prepare a coordinated care plan for the resident by the retirement village. During this assessment, GPs provide certification of GST-free eligibility as part of the clinical service provided by the GP.

“As a result, where the GP certifies GST-free eligibility as part of the broader care-needs assessment, Medicare benefits would be payable. However, this would not be the case if the sole purpose of the GP visit was the signing of certification of GST eligibility – the visit would not attract a Medicare benefit.

“I have today received written confirmation from the Minister for Health, the Hon Tony Abbott MP, that he supports in-principle the continued certification by GPs of GST-free eligibility for residents of serviced apartments in retirement villages provided that certification is included as part of an assessment of the patient’s ongoing care needs.

“We are now giving our attention to the practical implications of this for implementation, and will likely be consulting further with relevant stakeholder groups.”

**The full text of the Minister’s speech is available at [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au)**

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