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Minister for Ageing

MEDIA RELEASE

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Quality standards for Aboriginal aged care

The Australian Government today detailed a plan to improve the long-term quality of aged care for Indigenous communities.

This includes setting – for the first time – an independent set of quality standards applied to flexible Aboriginal aged care services in remote and very remote communities.

This is supported by a \$46.2 million program to support care staff and management, provide locum relief and improve facilities.

These services are outside the Aged Care Act 1997, which oversees nursing home standards in Australia.

The new quality standards will apply to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care Program - set up in 1994 – to provide services in Indigenous communities that would not be able to support a nursing home on the urban model.

(Before this program, older Indigenous people had to leave their communities to receive aged care.)

There are 30 Aboriginal flexible aged care services, providing about 700 places in mainly remote and very remote areas. The Government has recognised the vulnerability of these isolated aged care services.

Mrs Elliot detailed the Government's plan to support and improve the quality of the flexible Indigenous aged care services:

1. Development of the first independent quality framework to set standards for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Flexible Aged Care Program. The framework will include standards for health and personal care, safety and physical environment, culturally appropriate lifestyle and effective management and governance. Mrs Elliot said that during preliminary consultations, providers of Indigenous aged care expressed support for a model that allows for peer assessment by providers and professional colleagues, who understand the cultural context within which their services operate.
2. A program of grants for capital works to improve the infrastructure of the flexible Aboriginal aged care services. This is needed as some services do not meet basic safety and amenity standards. This includes funds for new building, refurbishment, extensions, staff housing and – importantly – for an ongoing maintenance program.

3. A Peer and Professional Support program for Aboriginal aged care – to begin later this year – to give aged care providers and managers access to a range of professional advice on governance, financial management and care management; to provide support to staff and locum relief while they undertake training or take leave; and provide funding for emergency clinical staff when required.
4. An emergency assistance program to provide short-term help in a crisis.

(The above points are funded by the Australian Government under the Remote and Indigenous Service Support Program at a cost of \$46.2 million over five years.)

5. Expanding employment and training opportunities for Indigenous people in aged care by:
 - Transferring 254 Indigenous people previously working under Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) to jobs in the Home and Community Care (HACC) program, to provide care to frail aged or disabled Indigenous people. This is being delivered already, in partnership with the Northern Territory Government;
 - Utilising \$5.2 million provided through the Northern Territory Emergency Response to address skill shortages amongst Aboriginal aged care workers; and
 - Using part of the \$30 million available for the four-year Support for Aged Care Training Program to train Aboriginal and Torres Strait aged care workers. (The Program will offer up to 1,400 training places for aged care workers in rural and remote areas. It is available to Registered Training Organisations to provide in-depth training courses for personal care workers in aged care.)

The Minister for Ageing, Mrs Justine Elliot said: “It is time the Australian Government started to work to improve the care of the frail and aged Indigenous Australians.”

“Indigenous Australians sometimes need aged care assistance at an earlier age than other Australians and have unique cultural needs, and they need protection and quality of care.

“This is about finding a delicate balance between culturally sensitivity and the health and welfare of older and frail Indigenous people.

“That is why we are taking a commonsense practical approach to providing aged care to Indigenous people in remote and isolated areas. Older Aboriginal people want to remain in their communities and are important leaders and role models.

“We will consult and take the advice of Aboriginal communities and the Aboriginal aged care sector.”

The 2006 Census found that there were 108,000 Australians who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders aged over 50. Indigenous people experience the onset of chronic, disabling health conditions 20 years earlier than the general population.

The Rudd Government is committed to closing the appalling 17-year life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people within a generation by taking practical steps to improve the health status and social and economic wellbeing of Indigenous Australians.

Timelines for National Quality Framework	
Date	
Jul 2008-Sep 2008	Develop requirements for the national quality framework.
Oct 2008- Jan 2009	Prepare tender documentation. Conduct tender process to engage an agency to develop quality standards including roll-out and training to providers delivery care under this program.
Jan -Apr 2009	Consultation with Indigenous communities and aged care providers Drafting of National Quality Standards Agreement of National Quality Standards.
Apr - Jun 2009	Development of training and communication package to support providers in implementing the National Quality Standards. Draft of training and communication package provided to the Department for comment.
Jun – Sep 2009	Roll-out of National Quality Standards and Training.

Currently, Indigenous Australians receive aged care through a range of mainstream and dedicated aged care services:

- Nursing homes and hostels covered by the Aged Care Act with accreditation standards assessed by the Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency and compliance overseen by the Department of Health and Ageing. (There are about 900 aged care residents who have identified as Indigenous.);
- Multi-purpose Services, a joint Australian, State or Territory government initiative to provide health and aged care services in rural and remote communities. Some of cater for a significant Indigenous population client base;
- The Home and Community Care program shared by the Australian Government with the States and Territories (There are almost 300 HACC services that have more than 50 per cent of their clients from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities);
- National Respite for Carers Program – there are 42 respite services across Australia providing respite for clients who are predominantly Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander; and
- The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care Program, which began in 1994 under the previous Labor Government to address the aged care needs of Indigenous communities. (There are 30 services under this program.)

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