



## THE HON JUSTINE ELLIOT MP

### Minister for Ageing

#### MEDIA RELEASE

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#### **Historic meeting of ministers for ageing/seniors – responding to Australia’s changing demographics**

Practical plans to respond to social isolation among older Australians will be on the agenda when the inaugural **Ministerial Conference of Ageing** meets this Friday (June 13).

Aged care homes and community care, dementia, aged care assessments and ways to improve care for people with psycho-geriatric disorders will also be discussed.

The first meeting will take place on the **13 June 2008** and will comprise the relevant Federal, State and Territory ministers. The New Zealand Minister for Senior Citizens\* and the Australian Local Government Association have also been invited.

It will bring together – for the first time – all of the nation’s ministers responsible for aged care homes, community care and the welfare of our nation’s older citizens.

The establishment of the **Ministerial Conference on Ageing** was an election commitment and was created in response to the challenges of Australia’s ageing population.

Australia’s ageing community is creating new challenges for governments at the national, state, territory and local levels.

“This is about ending the blame game and all levels of government, local, State, Territory and Federal, working in partnership,” the Minister for Ageing, Mrs Justine Elliot said.

The “MinCo” (Ministerial Conference) framework was agreed to by the Council of Australian Government (COAG) on March 26. (At the time, its creation was welcomed by the Australian Medical Association.)

The decision-making processes will be similar to the Australian Health Ministers’ Conference and the Community and Disability Services Ministers’ Conference.

“Caring for our ageing population is one of the major challenges facing our nation this century - and as a Government - we take that responsibility very seriously,” Mrs Elliot said.

“The Australian Government is responding to this exciting challenge. Over the next four years, funding for aged and community care will reach record levels of more than \$40 billion -- with \$28.6 billion of that on residential aged care alone.

“No government in Australian history has spent more on aged care and community care than this one. We are proud of our plans for aged and community care.

“This is about planning for Australia’s future and the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century,” Mrs Elliot said.

The meeting will be held on 13 June 2008 in Kingscliff, northern New South Wales – a region with one of the highest proportions of older people in Australia.

Mrs Elliot said social isolation is a significant issue for Australia’s older population.

“Years ago, older generations had strong family support networks – but today’s contemporary lifestyles and smaller family structures have changed this.

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

“The inaugural Ministerial Conference of Ageing will look at practical measures to ensure our older Australians remain connected to the community.

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

So far, the draft agenda include:

- **Responses to Social isolation.** Identification of programs and initiatives to reduce the isolation of older people, especially those in public housing; consideration of the development of a national protocol with work to be done by Commonwealth and state and territory Departmental officials.
- **Discussion of the progress of the Aged Care Assessment Program.** Aged Care Assessment Teams (ACATs) are a vital gateway for people to get Commonwealth-funded services from aged-care residential beds to packages allowing them to stay longer in their homes and local communities.
- **Discussion on Home and Community Care Program.** A progress report on the implementation of the new Home and Community Care Agreements and the development and implementation of common arrangements, as well as the outcomes of the forum on restorative care and the implications for future service delivery. (Older Australians are telling us that they want to remain in their homes as long as possible and lead independent lives.)
- **Continuous improvement in the physical standard of residential care building.** Harmonisation of Commonwealth and state and territory regulations with the aim of reducing the regulatory burden on the industry, while ensuring that accommodation for care recipients is safe, and maintained at the highest standards.
- **Built environment (age-appropriate housing).** Identify current programs and strategies that promote the adoption of universal design principles; identify future strategies for education programs on the benefits of adaptable design principles.
- **Aged care and people with psycho-geriatric disorders.** Collaborative approaches to ensure effective integration of primary, acute, specialist and aged care services to ensure appropriate care and support for this client group. (The Government has asked the relevant Deputy Secretary of the Department of Health and Ageing, Ms Mary Murnane, to consult with experts and providers of psycho-geriatric care.)

\* New Zealand Minister for Senior Citizens has been invited as an official observer. (Currently, there are more than 29,000 people who were born in New Zealand and now live permanently in Australia. More than a third of them live in Queensland.)

### **Ageing in Australia**

Australia’s population is getting older with our life expectancy the fourth longest after the Japanese, Swiss and Icelanders.

About 13 per cent of our population (some 2.8 million people) is aged 65 years or older. This is expected to rise to 18 per cent by 2021 and to 26 per cent (around 7 million people) in 2051. The number of people aged over 80 years will almost double over the next 20 years.

Currently, there are 2,860 Australians over the age of 100 and that is expected to increase to 78,000 by 2055.

There are 2,870 aged care homes with 170,000 beds across Australia, receiving Commonwealth funding.

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