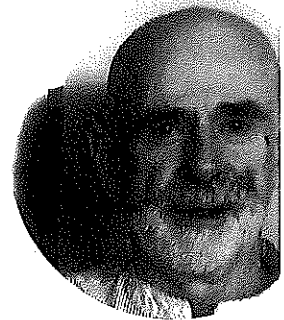


A message from our CEO...

Les MacDonald

CEO, Meals on Wheels NSW



It is I think important that I address the issues that have diverted so much of the Association's and the network's time and resources over recent months into fruitless, unnecessary and damaging interpersonal and inter-organisational conflict. In order to understand that, it is necessary to have some context to those events. The Federal Department of Health and Ageing decided nearly two years ago now, to appoint an external consultant to provide assistance to MOW services around Australia to develop processes, systems and tools to enable those services to cope with the emergence of the new funding and classification system that the then government were proposing to introduce into the Care at Home space for older Australians by end June 2023. The Department appears to have decided upon that course of action without having a relatively mature understanding of the complexity of the MOW system throughout Australia and of the different levels of development and structure that then existed between different states.

That created a major problem in that when the consultants who were appointed to undertake that task turned their minds to the task, they found to their surprise that what had been told to them about that complexity and differences in structure had been correct. That raised the question of how the consultant was to deliver on what they had undertaken to do across Australia in their contract with the Department. It was apparently decided that the body chosen to take the blame for that lack of understanding by the Consultant and the Department was The Australian Meals on Wheels Association (AMOWA). Thus began a process which led to confusing both the Department and AMOWA as to the alleged actions and decisions of each other. As a result of that confusion, whether deliberately created or due to failure of processes, the Department were led to believe that AMOWA was a problem for Future Fit and should be excluded from participation. It appears apparent from statements attributed to the Departmental Officer concerned that he believed what he was being told. The result appears to have been the exclusion of AMOWA from the Future Fit process at a very early stage.

In order to cope with the reality that the consultant belatedly discovered they began to drastically modify the coverage of the project by in effect reducing it to principally two states, Queensland and New South Wales, and changing the language to suggest that those two states were the only parts of the network that were "active" and functional. The creation of that impression appeared to be necessary to deal with the fact that the original contract with the consultant was meant to deal with the entire MOW system throughout Australia.

In order to show delivery on the contract requirements it became clear that it was necessary to achieve the participation of virtually all the services in those two states for the project to have any credibility within government. The two state bodies were convinced to try to assure that level of total participation, despite expressions of concern about the ability to achieve that level of participation. Both bodies responded actively and professionally and put major resources into achieving the two stocktakes, without much yet in the way of return to the services for that participation. That effort to obtain sign-on

A message from our CEO cont'd...

was complicated by the inability to obtain a clear and compelling indication of what services would achieve from the process. That lack of clarity has continued pretty much up to the present, compounded by a culture of secrecy worthy of ASIO. That failure in transparency has led to some distrust within the network in NSW as to what exactly it is that they will get from what is a very time consuming and costly expenditure of public funds.

To further complicate the issue, a very small number of member services within the network whose service model ideas do not correspond with those of a clear majority of the network, appear to have seen Future Fit as a way to put their system design ideas into practice throughout the network. Those member services have created, almost certainly unwittingly, a level of potential conflict and dissension within the network that, if successful, could be extremely damaging to the reputation and service model that services have worked so hard for decades to develop and sustain. The ideas of this small group, in so far as it is possible to summarise a broad collection of not necessarily related ideas, appear to focus around the idea that our network can best survive by changing our service model to match the service model of commercial organisations in the meal supply to the home space. That means, to a greater or lesser extent, changing from our very successful relational model of service delivery to a far more transactional model. There are a number of other ideas within that group including centralising purchasing functions, eliminating production kitchens and purchasing all supplies from commercial meal suppliers, etc. As you will all know we have canvassed the network on a number of occasions about such ideas and you have convincingly demonstrated that you simply do not agree with adopting those. We will of course continue to seek your views as circumstances change.

Unfortunately whether deliberate or due to incapacity, the combined efforts of this rather disparate group appears to be undermining the established roles of both MOWNSW and the bulk of the services. The cumulative effect of their actions in collaboration with the consultant, appears to have led to the unfortunate, costly and diversionary situation which we recently faced on the board of the Association. That has not only absorbed enormous amounts of board and staff time, but has cost a very substantial amount of money that would otherwise have been spent in supporting the network. We are working hard to put these aggravations behind us and continue the high level of services that we know that you appreciate and expect. We have convened a Webinar that all members have been invited to attend that will give an opportunity for members to understand the complexities of the situation that has arisen and to ask whatever questions they feel need answering.

I am sure that you all appreciate that division in such networks as ours only renders us weak and vulnerable and that is the last thing we need during a time when we are lobbying flat out to support all of you and to ensure you have a long and healthy future.