

Report by Yvonne Yun, Acting Manager Community Services

RECOMMENDATION

That Council advocate with funding organisations and service providers to address more fully the needs of local seniors.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

- To provide background information for Council's Community Development Advisory Committee on the potential emergence of poverty and disadvantage for local seniors.
- To highlight a need for significant advocacy for increases to local Home and Community Care (HACC) services in Strathfield.
- To identify the Council areas requiring additional focus to meet the needs of aged and ageing in the Strathfield LGA.

REPORT

Background

Current evidence suggests that affordable home help/domestic assistance and other support services for frail aged residents of Strathfield local government area (LGA) is at a critical short supply.

By definition, "frail aged" refers to any senior, generally aged over 65 years, who is endeavouring to maintain independent living in the face of diminishing capacity. These seniors can find that they are confronted with the prospect of entering a residential care environment because they simply cannot manage routine living tasks, such as shopping, cleaning, personal hygiene or getting around. The Home and Community Care (HACC) service offering is intended to support elderly residents to remain in their own home for as long as possible.

Entry to the HACC Program is by self referral directly to a service or through the local Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT) currently based at Concord Hospital.

The current position in regard to HACC services is that residents are faced with being turned away because bookings from a key service provider who are closed or else they can expect a 12 month wait for service availability.

Through a number of recent seniors' events or programs facilitated by officers, Council has been made aware of significant shortfalls in service needs and service delivery for domestic and home maintenance services. The position with regard to Community Transport has recently improved so that there is currently capacity for an additional five local residents on the Shopping Bus and ad hoc service needs can currently be met.

The local service offering for these types of service is:

Government funded services under Home and Community Care (HACC)

The **Home Care Service of NSW** is a major provider of domestic assistance. Frail older people and younger people with a disability and their carers who have difficulty managing in their own homes are eligible for help from the Home Care service. However, all the evidence suggests that the service is severely stretched, cannot meet demand and that the bookings are frequently closed for new referrals. It is difficult to assess the level of unmet need because Home Care does not keep a waiting list.

Should a person be fortunate enough to receive a service from Home Care the current hourly rate for domestic assistance is \$10.30 for pensioners and \$15.45 for self-funded retirees.

Baptist Community Services (BCS)

Baptist Community Service, another community provider of service, has a twelve month waiting list for domestic assistance. The maximum cost is \$10 per hour and people pay the same level of fee regardless of whether they are pensioners or self-funded retirees. Service levels are usually up to 2 hours per week. Assistance can include vacuuming, washing, cleaning, making beds, hanging out clothes etc.

Veterans Home Care

Holders of a Gold or White Veterans Card may be able to access Veterans Home Care, following an assessment. The cost is \$5.00 per visit and waiting time is approximately 2 weeks from the request for assistance.

Private Service Providers

Residents of Strathfield LGA have access to private or 'user pays' service providers who offer domestic assistance. Fees associated with these services are generally in the range of \$35.00 - \$44.00 per hour and therefore much more expensive than either Home Care or Baptist Community Services. Providers in this category include **Careworks Assist, Essential Care Services and Co. As. It Home Help.**

In theory, any senior unable to pay for HACC services is not to be denied service. However, in practice this does occur.

Emergency Issues for the Strathfield Community

Officers working with this cohort are aware of several emerging issues. These include, but are not limited to:

1. The lack of affordable service to maintain independent living for seniors in the LGA
2. A growth in self funding retirees who will, over time, become asset rich and cash poor. This is particularly the case with single female retirees. Their position requires advocacy to ensure that their needs are met and that ageing for these residents is well supported.

3. Many of these residents will be faced with the very real prospect of “back trading” their homes in order to purchase smaller, more affordable properties to maintain independent living.
The implications of this are quite far reaching and include potential social isolation and the availability of affordable local housing for these seniors to purchase in to remain within this LGA.
4. Of particular concern for local seniors from a CALD background is the loss of traditional care and support models based around family care. For many, cultural practice precludes acceptance of service provision from external service providers who are not culturally or linguistically skilled to meet their needs.

Community Feedback

Feedback was sought from the Community Development Advisory Committee regarding this matter. The responses received indicate the following trends:

1. 50% of respondents remain over fifteen years away from retirement
25% were retired on an aged pension
25% were self funded retirees
2. Respondents anticipated a variety of reasons for being forced to leave their own home, including cost health and lifestyle issues.
3. 100% of respondents held the view that the Strathfield LGA does not offer any affordable housing for the elderly
4. 100% of the respondents ranked Domestic Assistance and Transport service as being critical to their capacity to remain in their own homes
5. The responses gathered indicate that only 50% of respondents were aware of Home and Community Care Services, 75% did not know anyone receiving HACC services and in regard to service delivery, those who had engaged with the HACC community were generally disappointed with waiting lists.

REFERRAL FROM OTHER DEPARTMENT

No referral was required.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Expenditure in relation to this matter will be met from funding provided in the current budget for salaries.

Report approved by:

Neale Redman
Director Corporate Services