

SUBMISSION

Productivity Commission

Inquiry into Caring for Older Australians

The ACT Chinese Aged Care Information Service is funded by the Department of Health and Ageing under the Community Partners Program (CPP). It has been in service since July 2007. Over the past three years the service has served a very useful purpose by getting the aged care information to the Chinese community, in particular the large number of elderly Chinese people who has poor command of the English language.

From the experience gained in the past years, we like to offer the following observations.

1. The Community Partners Program has been effective in promoting understanding of the Australian health and aged care system to the culturally and linguistically diverse communities, including the Chinese community. It has raised awareness of the available aged care services in the communities and help to improve access and usage rates.
2. From experience it showed that a purely information service is not sufficient to achieve the increase usage of aged care services as language barrier is a major factor in stopping services being used by those people with poor English command. The CPP service needs to provide client service and language support to link clients to the service providers. The range of assistance needed include: making phone enquiries, assisting clients to make applications, providing language support to the client by accompanying them to their medical and other appointments. Also the CPP information service can provide cultural and language support for service providers when they have clients that does not understand English.
3. It has been found that social gathering and activities are the most effective way to get information across to the community. The current limitation within the CPP that funds cannot be used for organising social activities is a handicap so that the results achieved are far short of the best possible outcomes. We suggest that this restriction be removed if the government continues the CPP. We feel that there is also advantage if the funding for CPP can be increased and extended to cover linkage and language support workers to assist clients and the service providers to get the best possible service provision.
4. A major difficulty faced by service providers is the lack of bilingual workers and language support. For example, clients using the Home and Community Care (HACC) and Community Aged Care Package (CACP) will face language problem when the workers come to deliver the services. Most of the workers are not bilingual and it is difficult to find workers that can speak the client's language. The problem of communication due to language barrier can result in poorer or inappropriate service being provided. We recommend that more people be encouraged to become bilingual workers in the aged care service sector. There may be a need for government subsidised courses for aged care workers to train more bilingual workers. There could also be incentives offered for existing aged care service workers to take up language learning to become bilingual or multilingual.
5. The cost of providing qualified and experienced interpreters is inhibitive. The use of Telephone Interpreting Service is not ideal as clients, especially elderly people, are reluctant to have interpreters that cannot be seen in person. There is also a shortage of qualified and experienced interpreters in most of the language streams. This is a complex problem that needs a coordinated approach.

30 July 2010