

## **Personal Submission on the Draft Report Caring for Older Australians**

I'd like to bring to your attention a particular group of people who have grave fears for the care they will receive as they age. They aren't mentioned in your report, and tend to be forgotten as the invisibly disabled.

Many people suffer from severe allergies and sensitivities to foods and environmental irritants such as perfumes, fragranced cleaning products, personal care products, fumes from traffic and machinery such as lawn mowers, printed material, synthetic fibres, pesticides and herbicides, and sometimes electromagnetic radiation/fields. Many naturally occurring items can be problems as well, including some plants, timber and freshly mown grass for example.

These sensitivities don't result in minor sneezes and hayfever type symptoms, but cause severe and disabling effects in a whole range of areas. Just some of these include migraines, fatigue, muscular and joint pain, heart irregularities, chest pain, breathing difficulty, mouth ulcers and other problems with the gums and tongue, digestive, gastric, urinary/genital and skin problems.

Aged care facilities as they are at present would be totally inadequate for most people with this condition, which is most often called Multiple Chemical Sensitivity, and we really fear for our futures.

Access to most public areas is severely restricted by the use of unsafe cleaners and overuse of fragrances, and many people are currently living very restricted lives due to this situation. They are being kept from educational and health facilities without it seeming to make any impact on the wider community. Also, visiting older friends and relatives in aged care is not possible. There is, however, a world wide movement towards fragrance free policies in these areas that will hopefully lead to wider acceptance of the fact that it is in everyone's best interest to reduce the chemical load they breathe, and not just for the benefit of the highly sensitive.

As far as aged care facilities go, perhaps the easiest way to address this is to have sections of existing facilities dedicated to those with these needs, with a separate entrance, low VOC paints and furnishings, windows and patios facing away from traffic and other pollutants. Staff would need to be fragrance free, and the separate entrance would keep visitors to other non-sensitive occupants away from those needing protection.

There are guidelines available to aid in implementing such a policy, but my main concern now is to raise awareness of the fact that we exist, and have a disabling condition that needs addressing just as much as other forms of disability.

Anonymous