



**Submission to the Office of Seniors on the Better Later Life (draft)  
Strategy**

**31 May 2019**

## About the NZACA

1. This submission is from the New Zealand Aged Care Association (NZACA) the peak industry body for the aged residential care (ARC) industry in New Zealand. We represent 93% or approximately 36,000 beds of the country's rest home industry. Our members' services include four categories of care, rest home, hospital, dementia and psychogeriatric, as well as short-term care, such as respite.
2. Our members range from the very small stand-alone care homes from as small as six beds in more remote areas of the country right through to the larger care centres of more than 100 beds, some of which are co-located with retirement villages.
3. Our members provide care for 32,000 people aged over 65 (with an average age of 84) who are some of the most frail older people in New Zealand. Many have co-morbidities and rely heavily on social and health services to enjoy a fulfilling life.
4. Advocating and lobbying to government to shape policies and create an environment that helps our members provide outstanding quality care and services for older New Zealanders is at the heart of what we do. We provide leadership on issues that impact on the success of our members, for example, the annual contract negotiation with District Health Boards (DHBs), the pay equity settlement and workforce recruitment and retention.
5. We produce valuable research, professional development opportunities, information and publications to help our members make informed business decisions, improve capability and keep them up-to-date with industry developments. We also run the annual industry conference, which is the showcase event for New Zealand's aged care sector.
6. Any enquiries relating to this paper should in the first instance be referred to Alyson Kana, Senior Policy Analyst at [alyson@nzaca.org.nz](mailto:alyson@nzaca.org.nz) or by phone on 04 473 3159.

## Overall comment

7. The NZACA is supportive of this draft *Better Later Life Strategy*, which focuses on older New Zealanders and ensuring New Zealand as a nation is in a position to support and enhance the lives of the increasing number of people expected to reach over 65 years old by 2034.
8. The strategy needs to ensure it focuses on all those aged over 65 years. The draft strategy has more of a focus on the younger old, i.e. those aged 65–80s. The NZACA would like to see more of an emphasis in this strategy on the older old, i.e. those aged over 80. The older old can be higher users of social and health services as well as less mobile.

## General comments

### *Social connections and isolation*

9. As a less mobile group the older old can be more susceptible to loneliness and reduced social connections. Many older people feel isolated and alone when they are at home – it is often difficult for a person to go out and daily contact with other people can be limited. Research has shown that aged residential care facilities improve the mental health and wellbeing of those who enter residential care from a community setting. The *Caring for our*

*older Kiwis*<sup>1</sup> showed 82% of people had improved to 'not feeling lonely' after around six months in an aged residential care facility.

10. Social isolation, lack of connectedness and loneliness are some of the biggest contributors to depression and arguably no other generation feels loneliness more intensely than older people. The *Caring for our older Kiwis* report shows 62% had an improvement in their depression rating scores following entering an aged residential care.
11. This research shows where appropriate aged residential care facilities can reduce the social isolation, increase the connection and participation, and mental health and wellbeing of those who may otherwise be isolated if they were to remain in their own home.
12. Therefore, this strategy should consider all options for preventing social isolation and loneliness, particularly for the older old, and this should include the role aged residential care facilities can play.

#### *Housing choices and options*

13. The NZACA supports the need to ensure appropriate housing choices and options are available to older people and notes that these options need to be available in all areas of New Zealand particularly in the rural and provincial regions.
14. Older New Zealanders need and want to have the ability to remain in their existing communities and should be able to. There needs to be a variety of accommodation and housing options available throughout all parts of New Zealand, this includes residential care options.
15. Residential care options, such as rest homes, are increasingly under pressure in rural and provincial areas of New Zealand as costs to operate these services rise while funding doesn't match. We need to ensure older people in rural and provincial parts of New Zealand who require residential care also have the option to remain in services in their current communities and do not have to go to larger centres to receive the care and support they require.
16. This will enable older people who require residential care to remain close to their communities and retain their social connections.

#### *Supporting decision making*

17. Older New Zealanders have the right to maintain the ability to make choices and decisions about their lives as they age. The NZACA fully supports and believes it is imperative to promote and increase understanding and the use of mechanisms to ensure older people have a say on their future as long as possible. There needs to be increased education and awareness of the roles of mechanisms, such as an enduring power of attorney (EPOA) and advanced care planning, to ensure increasing numbers of New Zealanders, particularly older people, put these in place while they still have the ability to.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://www.nzaca.org.nz/policy/caring-for-our-older-kiwis/>

18. Cost is a barrier to some to put an EPOA in place, so we would like to see reduced fees for those who may not be able to afford the associated costs.

#### *Elder abuse*

19. The NZACA supports the move to raise awareness of elder abuse, particularly at the hands of a family member or person of trust. As a society, abuse of any kind is unacceptable.
20. We also support the development of support services for those who are a victim of elder abuse, as well as resources for those who may suspect there is a victim of such abuse.

#### *Valuing and respecting*

21. The notion of older people being valued, respected and opportunities to contribute to society is strongly supported by the NZACA and members. In fact, there are many examples throughout our membership of fostering intergenerational connections. It is very common for aged care providers to host mums and bubs groups, preschool and school age children at their facilities both on a regular basis and one-off events. These help to foster intergenerational connections as well giving the younger generations an understanding of the older generations.

#### *Transport*

22. Transport has the ability to greatly improve the lives of older people. Public transport and new transport technologies, such as self-driving cars, have the potential to improve the opportunities for the younger old population. But there also needs to be transport options available to ensure the older old, who are likely to have significantly reduced mobility and may need support to use these options, can maintain a lifestyle outside of their home. This could include services similar to Driving Miss Daisy.

#### *Digital inclusion*

23. As a society we need to consider how the increasing move of services being accessed online impacts on those who do not use technology. Not only do we need to ensure that there are multiple channels to access government services so not to isolate those who do not use technology, but the same practice needs to be encouraged across all sectors, including the private sector.

#### **Possible initial priorities**

24. The NZACA believes another area that should be an initial priority in this strategy is the mechanisms to enable older people to retain the right to make choices or decisions about their lives. We would like to see the increased promotion, education and understanding of the roles of an EPOA and advanced care planning to increase the numbers of people who put these in place. We believe this is an initiative that would have a big impact on the roles older people are able to play in their care as their health deteriorates.

## Conclusion

25. The NZACA is supportive of this draft *Better Later Life Strategy* but there are a number of areas that need to be looked at further, particularly around the focus this strategy will have in terms of enhancing the lives of the older old, i.e. those aged over 80.

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