

Hon John Carter

Minister for Senior Citizens



23 April 2010

Speech

Address to New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services Conference 2010, Auckland

Thank you for the invitation to speak to you today at this important conference. My colleague, the Minister of Health, is sorry that he can't be here with you today, but I am very pleased to be here on his behalf.

I would like to acknowledge the fantastic work the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services does in communities throughout New Zealand. The conference theme and your vision of “working together with older people to make a difference in their lives and the lives of those around them” really resonate with me as Minister for Senior Citizens.

I will take this opportunity to speak to you about the Government's vision for older people, and how we can work together to care for and support older people now and into the future. While I have focused strongly on health issues today, I want to note also, the many positives of ageing.

While some of our senior citizens require varying levels of assistance and care, many live healthy and independent lives; this is more so now than ever before. One of my key priorities is to see that this is well understood and to change the negative attitudes about ageing. I want New Zealanders to get used to seeing older people as colleagues at work and as mentors, and to recognise them for the active members of their communities that they are.

We are all aware of the aged care issues, many of which are not new. These include retaining and training staff, the cost pressures on providing care and support in the home and in aged residential facilities and importantly, the quality of that care. The increasing numbers of older people with dementia and other debilitating chronic conditions is also a major factor.

This Government is committed to working with your association and others to meet the present and future care and support needs of older people. To progress our priorities in this area, in the last Budget we committed to a number of initiatives and provided extra funding for aged care.

These initiatives are providing better services for older people and are setting a good foundation to respond to the increasing numbers of older people in New Zealand who will need care in the future.

The initiatives, now well underway, include passing on to aged residential care providers the full funding for cost pressures, and District Health Boards have received an extra \$18 million to support aged care providers to retain their nursing staff. This funding will assist in developing the aged care workforce by improving the quality of nursing and supervision in residential care. We have anecdotal evidence that this extra funding for nursing staff has already assisted providers with retaining registered nurses.

Additionally, through the provision of \$5 million in last year's Budget specifically for residential respite services for older people, we have supported their carers in the community who need to take a break, to do so.

We are committed to better monitoring of aged residential care facilities so that they meet quality standards. This includes a review of residential care auditing, the introduction of spot audits from January this year, and the publication of audit reports on the Ministry of Health's website since June 2009. This new way of reporting is making a difference and means that older people and their families can now check how well the facility that they have

chosen is doing in providing the quality of care standards we expect to be achieved.

Developing a sustainable aged care sector is a key strategic priority for the Government. There is currently about 570,000 people aged 65 years and older in New Zealand. This is expected to have increased to 1.09 million aged 65 years and older by 2031. The largest relative population increase is projected to be for those aged 85 and over. This is obviously our key population of interest for funded care and support.

The rest of the sector, as you have, has recognised the need to get ready for these changes. DHBs and aged care providers will be working together to review aged residential care. The review is essential to assess the current and future demand for services and will give the Government an indication of what resources are required to meet that future service demand and workforce requirements. The review is expected to be completed later this year.

I know your organisation plays a critical role in providing support for families, and services for people with dementia living in the community and in residential care. I also know that you make a significant contribution to studies about future directions for dementia services. I believe the changing demographic of New Zealand's ageing population will create more challenges in this area and I know that your organisation is the right one to help to meet these challenges.

Given population projections, dementia is one of the major issues for the future development of policy and services. This is because the numbers of people of any age who will develop dementia is expected to increase significantly. Given current knowledge, each person will require a high level of support.

Up until the present time, nation-wide service development has been varied,

with different structures and funding streams. The Ministry of Health is working closely with District Health Boards and interested stakeholders, including providers, to develop material to guide and advise DHBs on the best ways to meet the specialist clinical mental health and addiction needs of older people, and for people of any age who suffer from dementia.

The purpose of this work is to develop an integrated approach that crosses traditional boundaries, to make it easier for people with dementia, and their carers, to access specialist services for older people including those already in residential care.

This subject leads into another issue I think it is vitally important that we get out and talk about. That is, protecting the rights and interests of older people by raising awareness of elder abuse and neglect. As you will be aware, elder abuse is a high risk for people with dementia.

Tackling elder abuse and neglect starts with raising awareness, talking about the problem and thinking about responsibility. Sadly, much of the abuse and neglect comes at the hands of family members – sons and daughters or husbands are the main perpetrators – the very people we would expect to be respecting and caring for older people.

Abuse can be physical, psychological, sexual and financial – the stripping of assets and leaving older people in poverty, unsafe and fearful.

The structure of families has changed rapidly in the past 50 years, perhaps making older people more vulnerable. Economic pressures, small families and those living away from their traditional homes and older relatives all contribute to a changing landscape for senior citizens.

Many senior citizens are leading longer, healthier and more active lives than their parents or grandparents. However, there are people who might have traditionally been looked after by extended family as they aged, but that is no

longer happening.

Without someone to champion them, older people who are unwell may not be able to manage the basics of daily life. They may be hungry, lonely and unable to care for themselves. Neglect is insidious and not always as obvious as abuse. But it is equally cruel.

As part of the It's Not OK campaign, a booklet was developed called *Take the Time... Value Older People*. It was created to share the message that all older people should be treated with respect and dignity – end of story. The booklet is simple and direct. It gives a guide to identifying signs of elder abuse and provides information on what to do to get help.

I like to keep a copy of this booklet on-hand so that I can share this message. Sometimes information is all a person needs to really make a difference and keep older people safe.

We are working with Work and Income and Senior Services staff so that they are aware of elder abuse and that they have the information and know what to do if they have suspicions of abuse or neglect.

Staff at Work and Income and Senior Services are already active in dealing with family violence issues and the new guidelines that we have developed will assist them to specifically focus on recognising, responding to and referring cases of elder abuse.

I think one of the key things around ageing in New Zealand, and it is certainly a priority for me, is changing attitudes about it. I believe the best way to create a shift in thinking is to let everyone know how much older people do across all levels of society, and to explain *why* some pre-conceived notions of older people as powerless and non-contributory are just not true.

As an organisation that interacts with volunteers, you will be aware of just how

many are senior members of communities. And of the value and power of intergenerational partnerships – young people learning from older members of the community and vice-versa. In fact, research done in the US suggests that one of the keys to healthy ageing is providing for future generations. Seniors who engage in a meaningful way with the young have more positive lives and better marriages than those who don't.

Some older people who choose not to carry on in the paid workforce have the time and inclination to work with younger generations in a mentoring role. Intergenerational programmes such as SAGES and LinkAge are creating communities that span age-groups to make meaningful connections. They're changing attitudes about what it means to be 'Generation X' or a 'Baby Boomer'.

SAGES is a community-based programme through which people can develop their skills in home management, cooking, budgeting and parenting. LinkAge is a resource for schools, promoting older people to help out with reading, in the school library, on school trips, coaching sports and in many other ways.

And as I've said, it is not necessarily a one-way street. Older people can learn from the young as well, particularly about technology. Having mobile phone and computer skills and an understanding of the capacity of the Internet can open new doors for older people.

Actually, the younger and older members of our communities have something in common – there are preconceived notions about how they look, feel and behave.

Of course there are older people who cannot remain so active in their communities and need extra care.

For this Government, a key strategic direction for the aged care sector is the development of a continuum of care for older people's services. This refers to

the full range of services older people require as they age and to providing health care in a “better, sooner, more convenient” manner.

Supporting more older people at home for longer means that we can expect people to need care for more complex health and support needs in the community. This means that DHBs and providers, such as you represent, will need to be at the forefront of developing new approaches and services for supporting older people who wish to age in their own home and in the community they are familiar with.

We know that many older people prefer to stay in their own homes for as long as possible but it is important that we can support them to be cared for in the best environment possible.

We need organisations such as yours to assist people as they age to think ahead of their future needs and to consider how they want to live, be cared for and supported in later life.

The Government recognises and applauds the work that the many organisations that make up your association do, to assist and support older people and other New Zealanders every day.

I would like to acknowledge the key role you have played over many decades in providing social services for the people of New Zealand. I am certain that you will continue to be active in creating a quality and caring experience now and into the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today and I wish you every success with your conference.