



The Benevolent Society position statement

Ageing well and the social inclusion of older people

Older people, whatever their stage of life or health status, should be supported to optimise their independence, dignity and autonomy so that they can lead full and active lives and participate in all aspects of community life.

Why this issue is important

Australia has a rapidly ageing population due to long term trends of increased life expectancy, the ageing of the post-war “baby boom” generation and declining birth rates. It is projected that the proportion of the population who are aged 65 years and over will increase to 14% by 2010, 18% by 2020 and then to 25% by 2050. This compares with the current proportion of 13%.

Particularly high growth rates are projected among people aged 85 years and over. Their numbers are projected to double over the next 20 years. This has considerable social and economic implications for Australians of all ages. Significant changes will be needed in government policies, resource distribution and service provision to ensure the social and economic inclusion of older people.

There is great diversity in the older population in terms of life experience and circumstances, cultural background, lifestyle and health and well-being. There are varying levels of need for services and support and different levels of vulnerability to social exclusion.

It is important to recognise the vital role of older people as active, participatory citizens not simply as passive recipients of services. Older people make a significant contribution to many aspects of our community prosperity, cultural richness and well-being, providing a wealth of valuable experience, knowledge and skills. They contribute through employment, caring, volunteering, advising, through participation in social and cultural life and as custodians of our history.

Older people’s wellbeing is influenced by advantages and disadvantages accumulated over a lifetime. These shape their sensitivity to crises and their resilience to them. The factors which contribute to ageing well and social inclusion include adequate income and material assets, appropriate and affordable housing, access to good quality health services, access to support and care according to need, access to transport, an age-friendly built environment, community attitudes of respect and acceptance, community connection and social networks, feeling safe, and opportunities to participate in all aspects of community life.

Older age can compound other aspects of disadvantage, with particular vulnerability linked to low income, inadequate housing, poor physical and or mental health, disability and social isolation.

The workforce as a whole is ageing. Ending premature and involuntary retirement and greater recognition and utilisation of older people's skills and knowledge, will enhance their economic and social inclusion and contribute significantly to society.

Careful consideration will need to be given to meeting the changing expectations and care and support needs of the older population.

What we will do

To actively support the social and economic inclusion of older people and promote ageing well we will:

- treat all older people with respect
- promote understanding of and respect for older people, their diversity, needs, preferences and aspirations
- provide high quality services to support frail older people and do so in ways which maximises their independence, autonomy and dignity
- ensure shared decision making with older people, their carers and families in our service provision
- involve older people in appropriate ways in the design and delivery of our services and programs
- recognise that some groups of older people are particularly vulnerable and take opportunities to support them
- promote community connectedness and social networks in our service delivery
- adopt organisational workforce policies which support the recruitment and retention of older people
- provide a range of opportunities for older people to participate in our organisation as volunteers, in line with their interests and capacities
- develop resources and strategies to support older people to plan ahead and make decisions which will enhance their future well being and autonomy
- develop and trial new models of housing, support, care and community connection that will help older people remain in their own homes and communities for as long as possible
- work in partnership with other organisations to advocate for policy and practice changes that will enhance the social inclusion of older people, support ageing well and make our communities more age-friendly.

Sources of information

Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006. Australian Social Trends 2006. (Catalogue 4102.0)

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The Circle, 2007. Australians old, let us rejoice. Social Ventures Australia, 2007.

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