

## ..... caring for our **Aged**

### Our Plan

The Democrats want to see the aged live with dignity and have safe and high quality services, regardless of ability to pay. Currently around 160,000 Australians reside in aged care and this figure is set to grow by a whopping 215% over the next 40 years as the population ages.

Residential aged care was largely overlooked in the Labor Government's health and hospitals reforms and there is still no commitment to indexing funding for services in line with rising costs of care. Recent decisions by Fair Work Australia provided welcome wage increases for staff of between 3 and 5% but Commonwealth funding will increase by only 1.7% in 2010.

The Grant Thornton Report showed an alarming decline in profitability of residential aged care, severely limiting the capacity to fund high quality services and the development required to meet growth.

We welcome the recently announced review of aged care services by the Productivity Commission (report due 2011) and hope its recommendations, unlike previous reports, including the Hogan report, are implemented.

Older Australians are now encouraged and supported to stay in their own homes for as long as possible so those entering residential aged care are more frail, more likely to have dementia and require much higher levels of care. This has still not been recognised by current funding arrangements.

It can be difficult to attract specialists, for instance podiatrists, psychologists and physiotherapists with expertise in geriatric care. The incidence of severe oral disease is many times greater for people in residential care than for those in the community and often leads to more serious conditions.

- A **National Institute for the Aged** to provide advice on benchmarks of care, subsidies, responses to the needs of special groups, research needs, bed numbers and workforce planning, to collect data and regularly review accreditation
- Remove the prohibition on **bonds** for residents admitted to high care, to help fund capital works
- National **standards and data** collection by Australian Institute of Health and Welfare on the health of residents
- A transparent process for determining annual **indexation of operational subsidies and fee caps**, that includes a capital component
- Tied funding to support high quality care and **wage consistency** with other health sectors
- Additional funding for **dementia and palliative care** supplements
- More resources for services for those with **short-term medical needs** such as IV therapy and the complex needs of Indigenous and CALD communities
- Greater **integration** of residential aged care and GP, hospital and home-based services, discharge-from-hospital support programs and rehabilitation where possible in residential care
- More **flexibility in funding** and, where appropriate, incentives for rural and remote aged care providers to co-locate with other community services
- A national **workforce strategy** including training in and development of seamless career pathways in aged care and wage incentives for training improvements
- Increase the number of undergraduate **nursing places** to the level recommended by the Hogan report