

CVS Review  
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To whomsoever it may concern,

**RE: Community Visitors Scheme Review**

Alzheimer's Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide commentary into the Community Visitors Scheme review.

Alzheimer's Australia is the peak body providing support and advocacy for people with dementia and their families and carers in Australia. Dementia is the second leading cause of death in Australia<sup>1</sup>, and there is no cure.

The care and support of people with dementia is one of the largest health care challenges facing Australia. It is estimated that there are now more than 342,800 Australians living with dementia, and over a million people involved in their care; and that by 2050 there will be nearly 900,000 people with dementia<sup>2</sup>. Each week there are 1,800 new cases of dementia in Australia, and this is expected to increase to 7,400 new cases each week by 2050<sup>3</sup>.

At 30 June 2014, 83% of people in permanent care needed a high level of care-compared with 76% in 2008. More than half (52%) of all people in permanent residential aged care had a diagnosis of dementia<sup>4</sup>.

Dementia has an enormous impact on the health and aged care system, with the cost of dementia to these sectors calculated to be at least \$4.9 billion per annum<sup>5</sup>. Dementia also has a profound social impact. People with dementia experience stigma and social isolation<sup>6</sup>, and family carers often find it difficult to balance work, life and caring responsibilities<sup>7</sup>.

In addition to informed choice and person-centred care, quality aged care service delivery for people with dementia includes access by the person with dementia to meaningful social engagement. This social engagement can be offered and supported through the Community

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1 Australian Bureau of Statistics (2015) *Causes of Death, Australia, 2013: Cat no. 3303.0*

2 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2015) <http://www.aihw.gov.au/dementia/>. Accessed 4 Nov 2015

3 Access Economics (2009) *Keeping Dementia Front of Mind: Incidence and Prevalence 2009-2050*. Report for Alzheimer's Australia.

4 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2015) *AIHW National Aged Care Data Clearinghouse*. Accessed 8 Nov <http://www.aihw.gov.au/media-release-detail/?id=60129552716>

5 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2012) *Dementia in Australia*.

6 Alzheimer's Australia (2014) *Living with Dementia in the Community: Challenges and Opportunities*

7 Brooks D, Ross C, Beattie E (2015). *Caring for Someone with Dementia: the economic, social and health impacts of caring and evidence-based support for carers*. Report for Alzheimer's Australia.

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Visitors Scheme and may assist people with dementia to be socially included in activities being held within residential aged care facilities.

In order to provide meaningful support and social interaction for people with dementia, volunteers participating in the Community Visitors Scheme must be provided education and support to interact appropriately with people with dementia, and be provided with some suggestions on how to communicate and make the interaction meaningful for both the volunteer and the person with dementia.

***An example of innovative service delivery approach:***

Alzheimer's Australia has explored various innovative approaches to address the common issues of social isolation that a lot of people diagnosed with Dementia face. One such project is the [Volunteer Buddy Program in Tasmania](#), which is designed to enhance the quality of life of people living with Younger Onset Dementia (YOD) by reducing social isolation and providing meaningful activity. Two of the most significant changes associated with YOD is the loss of independence and increase in social isolation. For many people with YOD the connections which they cemented into middle age (e.g., with family, the community, work, their children's school and social activity) are severely disrupted and sometimes severed as the condition progresses. As the person with YOD struggles to access age appropriate supports and services, they also have a diminishing capacity to participate in meaningful activities and maintain a sense of purpose in their lives. A major component of social isolation and the loss of independence experienced by people with YOD, is the restriction or mandatory relinquishment of an individual's driver's license when cognitive functioning impacts on driving ability. This is often coupled by added pressures placed on carers (e.g., to be the sole breadwinner) and a reduction in social networks which leads to a loss of meaningful activity and social connection.

The program, funded through the National Quality Dementia Care Initiative, matches people based on similar interests, skills, culture, personality and hobbies. This matching process helps form genuine connections between volunteers and people with YOD. This relationship is the foundation for change and benefit to people's lives. People with dementia feel a sense of connection and have something to look forward to when involved in the program. They have better mood and a sense of being valued. Carers enjoy seeing their loved one being happy and participating in their community. Carers also receive respite from their caring role by being a part of this program.

The best-practice model developed for volunteers engaging in a buddying service with people with YOD is successful due to its flexibility and consumer-directed nature. The program also has the potential to change dementia stereotypes in the community through partnerships with community providers which involves education and awareness raising about YOD. The program is relatively inexpensive, simple in its design and could easily translate across service providers in different states and territories.

Volunteers within the Community Visitors Scheme may also play an important role in the assessment of aged care services' accreditation standards. In a similar vein to a 'mystery shopper' role, a volunteer within the Community Visitor Scheme should be provided with information on the expected standard of care from a service and should be encouraged to provide feedback to both the service and the Australian Aged Care Quality Agency with regard to the adherence of quality accreditation standards.

In the case of residential care, the key to good care is ensuring access to meaningful social engagement, support to remain as independent as possible and a flexible approach to providing the best possible care for the individual resident.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to this consultation. Please contact us if you require further information.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maree McCabe', written in a cursive style.

Maree McCabe  
A/g CEO  
Alzheimer's Australia

21 November 2016