



A new challenge

Alan Graham - Aged & Community Services

Understandably much of the emphasis in the aged care sector has been about the need to reform an ailing system so that we create a sustainable industry. There is an abundance of evidence that now demonstrates that the capital and recurrent funding arrangements need to be fixed along with the introduction of an indexation 'tool' that is based on the cost of care rather than an obscure formula devised by the Federal bureaucracy years ago. Fix that and you will have fixed the challenges that confront the industry. Well not quite because there are many other challenges that the aged care needs to address.

The changes in the make up of Australian society evident since World War II with the intake of different 'waves' of immigrants has manifested itself in our aged care facilities. Indeed we have for a long

time now had ethno specific services catering to the needs of the Maltese, Greek, Italian and other cultural groups. And it is only a question of time before we have facilities for the more recent Asian migrant intake. Mainstream aged care providers are now also partnering with cultural groups to improve service delivery to those in need and there is now a good (and continuously improving) level of cultural appreciation and sensitivity among mainstream providers of the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse groups.

We are however about to embark on a new challenge. A recent research paper from Alzheimer's Australia: *Dementia, lesbians and gay men* details the numerous challenges gay and lesbian seniors with dementia, encounter in community and residential aged care. For a long time of course laws forbid open sexual expression and many lived a 'closeted' life. The onset of dementia can mean that

previously guarded behaviour may be forgotten and as a consequence there are inadvertent revelations of latent sexuality.

Once lesbian and gay men reach old age they may find themselves dealing with community and residential services where staff may not understand their needs. The paper raises a number of topics such as legislative issues, providers' obligations, intimacy (and reactions from other residents), acceptance by other residents and accreditation to name a few. Advance care planning is a major issue for gay couples because of differing state legislative treatment.

The Alzheimer's Australia report is timely. The aged care sector now needs to consider the initiatives that it will put in place thereby responding in a way that ensures that all residents are treated appropriately and given the respect they deserve. It is a challenge I am confident the sector will respond positively to.