

Introduction

Jewish tradition places great stress on respect and care for older people. The Fifth Commandment enjoins us to honour our father and mother. Psalm 71, known as the Prayer in Old Age, expresses confidence that the Lord will care for aged persons:

'Cast me not off in the time of old age; When my strength fails, forsake me not'.

These injunctions are of particular relevance to our community in Australia, which is significantly more aged than the Australian population at large. In formulating policy principles for the Board, we should also take note of authoritative statements by the United Nations and other bodies concerned with aged care and the rights of older persons.

United Nations Principles

The following seven points have been extracted from the UN Principles for Older Persons, published in 1991:

- 1) Older persons should be able to live in environments that are safe and adaptable to personal preferences and changing capacities.
- 2) Older persons should be able to reside at home for as long as possible.
- 3) Older persons should be able to seek and develop opportunities for service to the community and to serve as volunteers in positions appropriate to their interests and capabilities.
- 4) Older persons should be able to live in dignity and security and be free of exploitation and physical or mental abuse.
- 5) Older persons should be treated fairly regardless of age, gender, disability or other status, and be valued independently of their economic contribution.
- 6) Older persons should be able to utilise appropriate levels of institutional care providing protection, rehabilitation and social and mental stimulation in a humane and secure environment.
- 7) Older persons should be able to enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms when residing in any shelter, care or treatment facility, including full respect for their dignity, beliefs, needs and privacy and for the right to make decisions about their care and the quality of their lives.

Aged Care Alliance

The Aged Care Alliance, formed in 1996, is an umbrella body whose membership embraces a wide range of service providers, professional associations, and organisations of older people. It works closely with the NSW Council of Social Service. In 1998, the ACA made a comprehensive submission to the NSW Government, which lays down a number of principles relating to aged care, and the following six points have been extracted from that statement:

- 1) Without diminishing the importance of acute hospital care and residential accommodation, greater policy emphasis and more resources should be allocated towards co-ordinated preventive programs whose aim is to keep older people fit, well and independent.
- 2) It is important to ensure an adequate supply of suitably skilled, experienced and committed people able to provide high quality community care.
- 3) Most older people, including those in need of care and support, want to continue living, wherever possible, in their own homes.
- 4) The nature of the policy challenge includes the growth in the numbers of older people, the nature and extent of their need for support, and the adequacy of care structures to provide that support. A co-ordinated policy response should address each of these issues.
- 5) The greatest proportion of assistance given to meeting the needs of older people for essential services comes from informal sources, primarily from their families and friends. However, demographic and social changes may be reducing the willingness of younger generations to provide care. The proportion of working age women in paid employment has increased significantly, thereby reducing the time available to give family assistance. Those women who combine employment with care-giving face a triple burden -- their own family, care-giving and work -- which they will have difficulty in sustaining over a long period without help from services.
- 6) The changing age structure of the population will put greater pressure on community based services. Family caregivers should be seen in their own right by service providers as an adjunct to the client and not necessarily as an alternative to their services. Services should meet the needs of carers, rather than carers having to fit the requirements of service providers.

Policy Principles for the Board

- 1) The NSWJBD accepts the principles contained in the above statements, and asks its affiliated organisations, as well as the JCA, to endorse them and take active steps to implement them.
- 2) The Board sees its role as one of advocacy in promoting the implementation of these principles within the Jewish community.
- 3) The Board notes that discrimination in employment, service provision, and a range of other matters on the grounds of age is prohibited by the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act and also by Federal legislation, and calls upon members of the Jewish community to avoid acts of age discrimination.
- 4) The Board recognises that older people wish to remain independent and to continue participating in community life. The Board also recognises that older people may need assistance to achieve these objectives, and recommends that communal organisations make every effort to encourage and support the independence of older people, and facilitate their continuing participation in the life of the community.

- 5) The Board takes note of the high proportion of Holocaust survivors among older people in the community, and asks service providers to take particular note of their circumstances and special needs.
- 6) The Board recognises that older people in the community who have come recently to Australia from non-English-speaking countries, particularly from the Former Soviet Union, frequently experience isolation as a result of language or cultural barriers. The Board recommends that member organisations make every effort to extend a genuine welcome to them, and encourage their participation in the life of the community. The Board further recognises that it has a responsibility to show leadership in this regard.
- 7) The Board accepts that most older people prefer to continue living in their own homes and should be assisted to do so as long as possible. To achieve this, the Board stresses the need for an effective network of community services, as well as the importance of strong informal community support.
- 8) The Board recognises that some older people may prefer to live in an aged care facility. Accordingly, the Board recognises the importance of adequate and affordable housing which is responsive to the needs of older people requiring supported accommodation.
- 9) The Board appreciates the special role played by carers in supporting older people, and recommends that communal organisations acknowledge the role of carers and identify ways of assisting them. Accordingly, the Board will work with appropriate communal organisations, including the JCA, to increase the availability of carer support and respite care services.
- 10) The Board recommends that Jewish aged care organisations should seek ways of co-operating with aged care programs managed by other ethnic and/or religious groups. This should include co-operation with the NSW Transcultural Aged Care Service (TACS), and participation in training and education programs such as those developed by TACS.
- 11) The Board recommends that organisations in the community providing services for older people should make every effort to work collaboratively. This would include measures to avoid overlapping and duplication, exchange of information, co-operative planning of programs, and co-ordinated approaches to Government for increased funding of institutional care and community based support programs.