

PAUL LYNCH MP

STATE MEMBER FOR LIVERPOOL



16 March 2011

Dr Sonia Laverty
Older Women's Network NSW
87 Lower Fort Street
MILLERS POINT NSW 2000

Dear Dr Laverty

Thank you for your recent letters to myself and other Ministers seeking an update about how the NSW Government is supporting older women in NSW.

The NSW Labor Government is working to achieve positive outcomes for older women.

Ageism:

Under *Towards 2030: Planning for our changing population*, the NSW Labor Government has sought to address ageism in the workforce, for example through the Mature Workers Retention Project and the development of the *SageCentre* resource website.

SageCentre provides an online toolkit designed to meet the needs of NSW public sector staff who are exploring retirement options or managing mature employees. *SageCentre* was recently rolled out to local government.

The NSW Ministerial Advisory Committee on Ageing has been exploring the issues of mature workers and ageism for several years. Recent published reports include: *Work and Older people Discussion Report* July 2009, and *Employment and Retention Strategies of Older Workers* June 2010. Both reports can be accessed at <http://www.maca.nsw.gov.au/>.

In recognition of the issues mature-aged carers face in the workplace, under the NSW Labor Government, the NSW Industrial Relations has commissioned and released *Taking Care: Mature Age Workers With Elder Care Responsibilities*. The Report investigates the particular needs of mature age workers with caring responsibilities and reports on current responses to this growing workplace trend.

Affordable Housing:

Under the NSW Labor Government, the \$104.4 million NSW *Homelessness Action Plan 2009–2014* outlines the key directions and actions that will guide the NSW Government's response to homelessness. Ten NSW Regional Homelessness Action Plans have also been developed as the regional implementation mechanisms for the NSW Homelessness Action Plan.

While this Plan has not set specific age-based targets in relation to older women, the Homelessness Action Plan does set headline targets for the reduction of homelessness. These targets focus on the reduction of homelessness across the population as a whole, and include:

- a reduction of 7% in the overall level of homelessness in NSW by 2013;
- a reduction of 25% in the number of people sleeping rough in NSW by 2013; and
- a reduction of one third in the number of Aboriginal people that are homeless in NSW by 2013.

Over the past four years, we have implemented *New Directions in Social Housing for Older People* through Housing NSW. This strategy aims to increase social housing for older people by an additional 2,800 homes over the period 2006-2011, and invest a further \$75 million in modifications to existing social housing properties to make life easier for older people living in social housing. We developed *New Directions in Social Housing for Older People* after consultation with older people, peak bodies representing older people and focus groups.

Housing NSW regularly engages through the following forums to ensure the community, including older women, are consulted:

- consulting on the *NSW Homelessness Action Plan* and *NSW Regional Homelessness Action Plans*;
- the Premier's Council on Homelessness;
- *Consumer Forums* and *Consumer Advisory Council*, facilitated by the Public Interest Advocacy Centre to inform the NSW Government on homelessness issues;
- Social Housing Tenants Advisory Committee; and
- NGO Housing Partners Reference Group.

One of the priorities of the NSW Labor Government, the *Homelessness Action Plan*, is to make better use of homelessness data and broaden the evidence-based response to homelessness. To support this priority, an evaluation strategy is being developed to guide the evaluation of projects under the Homelessness Action Plan. The success of the *Homelessness Action Plan* actions and initiatives will inform how the NSW Government will realign future resources.

Prevention of violence against older women

Addressing violence against women, including older women, is a priority for the NSW Labor Government.

The \$50 million NSW *Domestic and Family Violence Action Plan* (Action Plan), which was released in June 2010, sets out our five-year plan to reduce violence against women. The Action Plan includes actions specifically targeting older women:

- The NSW Labor Government will support the wellbeing of older people through prevention and education strategies around violence and other crime (action 54). *(This action is also priority 2.2.8 in Towards 2030: Planning for our changing population.)*
- The NSW Labor Government will liaise with the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners on ways to promote and encourage best-practice, consistent training on domestic and family violence-related issues for general practitioners, particularly in relation to cases of violence against older women (action 80).
- The Action Plan commits to supporting research into the understanding of service providers about the needs of older women experiencing domestic violence, and mapping the 'hidden homelessness' of older women leaving their homes as a result of violence (action 90).

The Action Plan also contains broader actions which will benefit all victims of domestic and family violence, including older women.

Health

The NSW Labor Government is committed to developing services tailored to the needs of the community and responsive to 'community members' changing requirements.

Within these principles, the importance of considering the effect of gender on health experiences and health needs is well recognised and reflected in service policies.

It is also true that the best health service planning and policy development processes take into account a wide range of factors that can influence health needs and moderate the effect of single characteristics such as gender. For example, age, place of residence and socio-economic status can be more powerful determinants of health need than gender.

Volunteers and Carers

The NSW Labor Government has introduced the Supported Care Allowance, a payment available to assist grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. Also released in 2010 was the NSW Statutory Declaration for Informal Relative Caregivers, which will allow grandparents and other relative caregivers to declare that they have primary responsibility for the regular care of a child or children. The Declaration will assist caregivers to give consent for the child to participate in activities, such as school excursions.

The Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care and the Council of the Ageing NSW have also been working together to implement the Raising Grandchildren website – a resource for grandparents to navigate the support available to grandparents and establishment of the Grandparent, Relative and Kinship Carer Alliance.

The NSW Companion Card allows people with a severe and profound disability, who require attendant care at events and venues, to participate without having to pay for a second ticket for their attendant at affiliated organisations.

Regarding home and community care, while there are consistently high levels of expressed demand for disability support assistance, nationally, NSW has the lowest proportion of people aged 0-64 with profound or severe core activity limitations living in households who need more assistance than they are currently receiving. The difference between NSW at 37.1% and the national average at 43.3% is statistically significant. Additionally, it is noteworthy that there is little variation between age groups for need for more assistance.

Transport

The NSW Labor Government is continually improving access to public transport for older people.

In NSW, pensioners and seniors card holders are eligible for a half fare concession on CityRail, government and private bus, and government ferry services. There is also the Pensioner Excursion Ticket which provides all day travel on metropolitan and outer-metropolitan public transport services, including trains, buses and ferries for \$2.50.

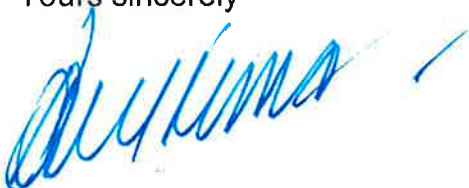
For seniors and pensioners in country areas, the Country Pensioner Excursion Ticket provides an economical way to travel in regional and rural NSW and the Australian Capital Territory on CountryLink's train and coach services at \$2.50 for a one way, economy class trip. These are the most generous concession arrangements of their kind in Australia.

A new program called "Travel Training" has been trialled successfully by the NSW Government in the Hunter region and in South-West Sydney. Travel training assists people who could use public transport, but do not have the knowledge or the confidence to do so.

The Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme assists people who are unable to use conventional public transport because of a qualifying severe and permanent disability. Through the scheme, the NSW Government provides a subsidy of 50 per cent of the taxi fare, up to a maximum of \$30 per trip. There is no limit on the number of trips or the total subsidy a participant can claim per year. Access to the scheme is not based on age and is not means tested. For ageing Australians whose mobility is severely impaired due to a qualifying disability, the scheme can provide substantial assistance.

If you would like further information on any of these initiatives please do not hesitate to contact Hayley Thomas, Policy Advisor to the Minister for Women, on (02) 9228 5668.

Yours sincerely



PAUL LYNCH
Member for Liverpool