

Media Release

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OLDER PEOPLE'S TALENTS ARE OVERLOOKED TO AUSTRALIA'S COST, SAYS THE BENEVOLENT SOCIETY

Australia must learn to better recognise the vital role of older people as active, participatory citizens and not just passive recipients of services, The Benevolent Society has declared in a paper released today.

The paper, "Ageing Well and the Social Inclusion of Older People," argues that Australia's rapidly ageing population presents considerable social and economic implications for Australians of all ages, and that significant changes are needed in community attitudes, government policies, resource distribution and service provision to accommodate these emerging demands.

But the picture is not all doom and gloom.

"Older people's skills are often overlooked, to the detriment of us all. What is needed is an ending of premature and involuntary retirement and greater recognition and utilisation of older people's skills and knowledge," says The Benevolent Society's Chief Executive Richard Spencer.

"Such developments will allow older people to contribute more significantly to society and prevent their exclusion from our communities and from the economic mainstream.

"The projected growth in numbers of people aged 65 years and over presents challenges for Australia but it also offers substantial advantages for our communities.

"Older people make a significant contribution to our communities, adding cultural richness as well as sharing a wealth of experience, knowledge and skills. They contribute in many areas - from employment to volunteering, from providing care to being custodians of our history."

Mr Spencer said the factors which contribute to the well-being of our older residents include:

- Adequate income and material assets
- Appropriate and affordable housing
- Access to good quality health services
- Access to support and care when needed
- Access to transport
- An age-friendly built environment
- Community attitudes of respect and acceptance
- Community connection and social networks
- Feeling safe
- Opportunities to participate in all aspects of community life.

The Benevolent Society has committed to the following 12 point program to actively support the social and economic inclusion of older people and to promote the cause of ageing well:

- Treat all older people with respect
- Promote understanding of and respect for older people, their diversity, needs, preferences and aspirations

- Provide high quality services to support frail older people and do so in ways which maximises their independence, autonomy and dignity
- Ensure shared decision making with older people who receive services from us, as well as their carers and families in our service provision
- Involve older people in appropriate ways in the design and delivery of our services and programs
- Recognise that some groups of older people are particularly vulnerable and take opportunities to support them
- Promote older people's community connectedness and social networks in our service delivery
- Adopt organisational workforce policies that support the recruitment and retention of older workers
- Provide a range of opportunities for older people to participate in our organisation as volunteers, in line with their interests and capacities
- Develop resources and strategies to support older people to plan ahead and make decisions which will enhance their future well being and autonomy
- Develop and trial new models of housing, support, care and community connection that will help older people remain in their own homes and communities for as long as possible
- Work in partnership with other organisations to advocate for policy and practice changes that will enhance the social inclusion of older people, support ageing well and make our communities more age-friendly.

For more information, contact Tracey Young at The Benevolent Society on 0449 901 753 or Graham Cassidy, Cato Counsel, on 0419 202 317.