

For immediate release:

Opportunity missed in aged care report

Wellington, New Zealand - October 15, 2010 - Quality is the keyword missing from today's report into aged care, says Wellington's leading in-home care provider.

A Report into Aged Care: What does the future hold for older New Zealanders was released today after a joint investigation by Labour, the Greens and Grey Power.

Elder Family Matters general manager Lawrie Stewart welcomed a report which recognises the importance of a society that values the elderly.

But he says the report's key recommendations are unlikely to achieve the "revolution"¹ it calls for, by focussing heavily on residential care facilities instead of promoting quality in-home care as an effective alternative.

Mr Stewart says the report undermines its own findings that "many older New Zealanders desperate to stay in their own homes are being pushed out because of inadequate home support services".²

"The report continues the presumption that it's a matter of when, not if, elderly go into a rest home. It calls for elderly to be treated with dignity and respect yet an over emphasis on residential care will see more elderly lose their independence as they are bundled into aged care facilities.

"An older person's home is more than a place to live – it's a link to their friends and community. It's a place they can call theirs."

Quality care means a focus on social and emotional wellbeing as well as physical needs, he says.

"This report misses the pressing issue of social isolation amongst elderly. Quality care doesn't just mean clean windowsills and a tidy kitchen – care is about ensuring our elders are comfortable, happy and active as they enter a new chapter in their life."

The reports calls for a revolution in aged care services that puts older people at the centre of an individualised care plan³, but fails to provide recommendations to achieve this, Mr Stewart says.

"An industry-wide improvement in the quality of in-home care can only be achieved if the elderly are given greater ownership of their care and which accredited in-home care provider they choose to utilise."

Wellington and Hutt Valley district health boards currently restrict funded in-home care to three home-help providers. "That's like limiting their dinner to a choice of McDonalds, Burger King or KFC. Our elderly should be given a choice to select a provider that offers higher quality care that meets their social, emotional and physical needs."

Quality improvements will not be made without addressing the low pay that caregivers receive.

¹ A Report into Aged Care: What does the future hold for older New Zealanders. Page 54, paragraph 1.

² A Report into Aged Care: What does the future hold for older New Zealanders. Page 5, paragraph 6.

³ A Report into Aged Care: What does the future hold for older New Zealanders. Page 55, paragraph 2.

According to today's report, the average caregiver's hourly wage is \$14.40⁴. Elder Family Matters caregivers earn between \$16 and \$18 an hour. "With fair wages we keep experienced staff, cut turnover and build long-term relationships between clients and compatible carers."

The report does not do enough to address low pay levels and without doing so its recommendations for Government-funded training and minimum staffing levels will not be met. "Training is important, but these investments will go to waste if the industry can't retain carers with a reasonable wage."

Quality in-home care is a more affordable alternative to residential facilities, says Mr Stewart. Residential care providers currently receive around \$820 a week in Government funding for some residents⁵, which, according to today's report, amounts to between 10 and 15 hours a week of direct care⁶.

"Elder Family Matters could provide twice as much care for the same amount, while allowing elderly to retain independence in their own home and community."

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⁴ A Report into Aged Care: What does the future hold for older New Zealanders. Page 30, paragraph 2.

⁵ [http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/pagesmh/5648/\\$File/max-contribution-oct2010.pdf](http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/pagesmh/5648/$File/max-contribution-oct2010.pdf)

⁶ A Report into Aged Care: What does the future hold for older New Zealanders. Page 34, paragraph 7.