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Speaking Notes For

Tabling of

A Review of Retirement Villages in the ACT:
A Discussion Paper

ACT Legislative Assembly

28 August 2008

Mr Speaker,

As we all know the ACT has a rapidly ageing population, ageing faster than in other jurisdictions.

The challenges posed by our ageing population are increasingly becoming the focus of economic and social policy, not only for the ACT Government but for Governments at every level.

That is why I am pleased today to be able to formally table this discussion paper, "Retirement Villages in the ACT". This paper is the result of extensive research and consultation into the retirement village industry, in the ACT, and other jurisdictions across Australia.

As I said, we are facing a very real challenge in relation to the ageing of our population, the result of a decline in fertility rates, an increase in life expectancy and the ageing of the now 'baby boomer' generation.

The 2006 Census indicates there are almost 66,000 people aged 55 years and over living in the ACT. It is expected that by 2047 the proportion of people living in the ACT aged 65 years and over will represent 21.5% of the total population. This is double the current elderly portion of our population.

As the population ages, people are expected to live longer, continue to actively participate in the paid or voluntary workforce, (beyond what is traditionally the retirement age), and maintain a high level of general health and well-being.

Mr Speaker, it is also expected that many people will seek to downsize their current living arrangements. For those elderly people in our community, remaining in the family home large enough to raise a family and set on a reasonable size block, may present challenges that, if not solved, may have a detrimental affect on one's wellbeing.

It was found during the consultation process, that people contemplating a move to a retirement village may not do so until their eightieth year and beyond. This phenomena poses additional challenges for those managing retirement village living.

Because of this, it is important that individuals are able to make informed choices that continue to maximise their living arrangements and their independence as they grow older. The ACT Government continues to support positive ageing through a number of strategies.

The Stanhope Government has a range of initiatives to make downsizing more affordable for older Canberrans, to help people adapt their housing and to age in place.

In relation to aged care and independent living property developments, the ACT Government is committed to working with the building industry and aged care providers to reduce the time in delivering high quality aged persons' accommodation. The whole of Government case management approach has assisted proponents on virtually all projects.

I have taken a personal interest in the welfare of people who have chosen to live a retirement village environment. As a number of matters, in relation to their living arrangements, have been raised with me, I believed it was important for me to explore this issue further, and for those most affected to have input into Government policy in this area.

In order to explore the experience and concerns of stakeholders, such as retirement village operators and managers, residents and peak seniors' organisations, I consulted widely through a number of forums across Canberra.

As a result of these discussions, a considerable number of written and verbal submissions were received from the ACT community. I was very pleased to receive such positive feedback and valuable insight into this important area of concern.

Mr Speaker, you will note that the discussion paper explores legislation in other jurisdictions which govern retirement villages. In particular it identifies that the following areas, that is:

- information disclosure
- financial management and
- dispute resolution, a

which require review, in light of current arrangements, to bring the ACT into line with other jurisdictions.

Many issues were raised by those who engaged in the consultation process, which largely surrounded matters that fall within the various legislative approaches taken in other jurisdictions, as I have previously mentioned.

It was evident from the consultation, that individuals who have chosen to live in Retirement Villages have had varied expectations, some of which may not have been met.

Through my forum discussions, there were also matters raised that are either not issues that can be addressed through ACT Legislation, i.e. matters for the Federal Government, or are concerns that need to be addressed through amendments to other ACT legislation, e.g. planning.

It will be necessary to pursue these matters however, and any others that may arise as we go forward to consult more widely.

The Ministerial meetings of Ministers on Ageing, that I attended earlier this year, may be a forum for discussion regarding some of these more complex matters.

For instance, it is a widely held belief that by entering into a contract for an independent living unit, within a facility that also offers a hostel and nursing home, that you are guaranteed a seamless transition of progressive living, when necessary.

In fact this is not the case and, as Members would be aware, nursing home and hostel care is funded and administered through Commonwealth legislation.

Other matters that were raised are concerns around communication. It became evident that the quantity of communication between management and residents for instance, varies quite considerably from one facility to another. However, Mr Speaker, one can't legislate on good communication.

The discussion paper outlines 31 recommendations in relation to possible legislation in the ACT.

I would like to acknowledge all those in the community that contributed to the discussion so far. It was with great pleasure to meet the people who will benefit from such legislation, if introduced.

As I said, this included residents, prospective residents, managers and owners. I would also like to thank the ACT Council on Ageing and Australian Seniors for their input so far.

Of course a consultation process such as this also involves many people behind the scenes, so thank you to those who provided venues, facilitated small group discussion and helped prepare this discussion paper.

I would especially like to mention my staff members here, Annika Hutchins and Emma Smith, for their months of hard work and commitment to this task. This indeed has been a team effort and today two staff members should be recognised for their part.

As I said Mr Speaker, I would encourage the wider community to make submissions on the proposals which I have put forward in this paper.

I would commend the recommendations to Members for their consideration and invite interested stakeholders to respond.

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