INVESTING IN SECURITY AND QUALITY OF CARE FOR OLDER AUSTRALIANS

The Howard Government has delivered more than $10 million over four years to back recently announced security and quality reforms for Australian aged care homes, the Minister for Ageing, Senator Santo Santoro, said tonight.

The Community Visitors Scheme, which enables volunteers to visit those residents in aged care homes who are often lonely because they do not have other family and friends coming to see them, will be significantly expanded.

Together, these measures will significantly boost both the safety and the quality of residential aged care in Australia.

Senator Santoro said the Government had backed its proposals for increased security for aged care home residents with a significant funding commitment.

- **Increased spot checks for residential aged care homes – $8.6 million over four years**

  “Funding for the Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency will be increased by $8.6 million over four years to allow a substantial increase in the number of unannounced visits to aged care homes,” Senator Santoro said.

  “Around 5,200 visits will be made each year, including about 3,000 unannounced visits, compared to 563 unannounced visits in 2004-05. All homes will receive at least one unannounced visit each year.

  “These extra spot checks will provide aged care residents, their families and the public with greater confidence that the high standards of care required by the government are being met on a consistent basis.”

- **Police checks for Community Visitors Scheme volunteers – $1.8 million over four years**

  “The Government is providing $1.8 million over four years to meet the costs of mandatory police checks for all volunteer visitors to aged care homes under the Community Visitors Scheme. Mandatory police checks will also be required for all staff in residential and community aged care services directly subsidised by the Australian Government.”
“Key personnel, such as directors of nursing, are currently required to undergo police checks and many services also require them for other staff. However, to date this has not been a mandatory requirement for all aged care staff, or for volunteers under the Community Visitors Scheme.

“Compulsory police checks throughout the industry will reduce the risk of unsuitable people accessing aged care services and causing physical or sexual abuse. Although such incidents are rare, these checks will provide added security and confidence to people in care and their families.”

Senator Santoro said the overwhelming majority of the more than 160,000 Australians who rely on our aged care systems already enjoyed high quality care from dedicated and loving staff.

“These changes will further build public confidence in the aged care sector.”

- **Community Visitors Scheme – additional funding – $4.7 million over three years**

From July 2006, the number of volunteer visitors to Australian Government-subsidised aged care homes supported by the Community Visitors Scheme will increase by 912 to 7,500. The additional visitors will be allocated to areas where there have been few or no visitors in the past so that the scheme will now cover all aged care homes.

The Community Visitors Scheme coordinates volunteers to visit aged care residents, bringing friendship and companionship to those more socially isolated and vulnerable frail older people who would benefit from more social contact and support. Volunteers who take part in the scheme are not paid, but may claim some expenses.

The Government will provide additional funding of $4.7 million over three years from 2006-07 to expand the number of visitors and increase the rate of funding to support existing volunteers.

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