

17 February 2022

Ms Natalie Suleyman
Chair
Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee
Parliament of Victoria
Parliament House, Spring Street
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Dear Chair,

cohealth provides this supplementary comment for your consideration during your deliberations for the **Inquiry into Support for Older Victorians from Migrant and Refugee Backgrounds**.

Robyn Wilmhurst, our Healthy Aging Leader, provided these reflections after her appearance before you with Christopher Turner, Chief Executive and Margaret Yung, Acting Program Facilitator - Aged, Residential and Outreach on Monday 31 January 2022.

Ageism and Social Inclusion

As a society we need to believe that first and foremost older people have the capacity and the desire to manage their own care needs. Ageist attitudes contribute to the development of ideas that older people can't or don't want to speak for themselves. Ageism runs deep within the community - most people wouldn't even notice they hold beliefs and stereotypes about ageing.

This idea appears to be more pronounced in some communities than in others. It leads adult children to believe that they need to act on behalf of their parents and the older person to believe they can't, or perhaps shouldn't, act for themselves.

People's perception of aging can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. If they believe being older means they experience weakness and pain, they may accept this without question, not realising that change is possible.

Ageism in health care may contribute to this. If the treating team share similar limiting attitudes, such as 'what can you expect at your age?' they can believe that there is nothing that can be done for the older person. Education is vital to support healthcare workers to ensure negative attitudes do not influence the care provided to older people.

Ageist beliefs have a significant impact on the health and well-being of older people and can lead to disempowerment, loss of confidence, isolation and cognitive decline.

But what if we empowered an older person, built their confidence, included them in the community with purpose and respect. How would things be different?

If older people are promoted for what they truly can be, and most are, I wonder if the health and well-being of older people more broadly will change.

Older people need purpose and direction just like everyone. We need to create communities that support ageing and promote the involvement of older people, where they can share their wisdom and experience.

Yours sincerely,

Christopher Turner
Deputy Chief Executive