

Mr Carmody

Embargoed until delivery



22

PRIME MINISTER

FOR PRESS

27 SEPTEMBER 1977

ADDRESS AT OPENING OF SINNAMON RETIREMENT VILLAGE, BRISBANE

It was with great pleasure that I accepted the Reverend Ray Hunt's invitation to open Sinnamon Retirement Village.

During the past two years, I have taken advantage of opportunities as they arose to familiarise myself with the varied welfare activities conducted by agencies which now form part of the New Uniting Church of Australia. These agencies provide many types of wide-ranging programmes serving the social and spiritual needs of the community. I have been impressed by the sense of genuine commitment and the very effective action displayed by these, and other, voluntary agencies.

The opening of Sinnamon Retirement Village is further illustrative of the church's continuing commitment to meeting the needs of the aged in Brisbane.

This complex, which will provide accommodation for three hundred aged people and twelve resident staff, is the product of a partnership between the Wesley Central Mission and the Commonwealth Government. Indeed, this village has attracted one of the largest Commonwealth grants - \$4.5 million - ever provided for a project of its kind; and further consideration will be given to increasing the grant under the Aged Pensions Hostels Act when full costs are known and have been submitted to my colleague, the Minister for Social Security.

My Government's social welfare philosophy places great emphasis on co-operative effort by community groups. We believe that interaction by individuals, groups and government - at all levels - is absolutely necessary for an effective approach to social welfare.

As a Government, we see one of our major roles as enhancing the ability of the voluntary welfare sector to provide services and facilities to those members of the community in need. It is these services that provide one very important back-up to the Commonwealth's programme of support for individuals. Our roles are complementary.

There are many areas in which Government services can never hope to match the services which voluntary agencies can provide. Voluntary agencies have an inherent flexibility which makes them well placed to meet many of the special needs of the aged and disadvantaged in a complex industrial society.

The voluntary work which organisations such as your own undertake has the enormous strength that is undertaken out of a deep personal commitment to a cause, and no amount of money could buy the dedication which organisations such as Wesley Central Mission can provide. But while money is not enough, the funding made available by the Government is of critical importance, and we have sought to provide effective financial aid to the aged.

This year, an amount of \$50 million is being provided for expenditure on aged persons homes and hostels in 1977/78 - \$7.6 million more than in the last financial year. From 1 October 1977, nursing home care will be brought into the health insurance system in the same way as other aspects of health care. This is a logical progression for the health insurance system which aims to cover every Australian whether he be in a doctor's consulting room, a hospital, or a nursing home.

As a result of the Government's proposals, patients in nursing homes who have private insurance will receive their nursing home benefits from private health funds. The Government will continue to pay benefits for those who do not have hospital insurance including those patients who pay only the Medibank levy or are exempt.

I deeply regret that certain organisations have - for their own selfish reasons - caused for nursing home patients and other elderly folk needless distress by implying that they will be disadvantaged by the new arrangements to be introduced on 1 October 1977, and that the Commonwealth will be withdrawing from payment of nursing home benefits and transferring the full liability to the hospital benefit funds. This is just not true.

In fact, from 1 October 1977, all patients in approved nursing homes will receive increases in benefit rates. In Queensland the benefits for ordinary care patients will increase by \$1.05 a week to \$82.60. And intensive care patients will receive an increase of \$22.05 a week, bringing their benefits to \$124.60. These new benefits, together with the statutory patient contribution, will completely cover the fees charged to 70% of patients in non-Government nursing homes, and substantially meet the fees charged to the remaining 30% of such patients.

The new scheme will give greater financial security to such patients, many of whom were previously experiencing serious difficulties in meeting the difference between the fees charged and the benefits received.

Ladies and gentlemen, were it not for the generosity and thoughtfulness of the Sinnamon family who presented the land to the church, this retirement village would not be here. I am told that James Sinnamon arrived in Australia in 1863 and that subsequently the family settled here and established a farm. A village situated on this site is thus not only a pleasant environment in which senior citizens can enjoy their retirement, but also a fitting memorial to the people who pioneered this land.