



PRIME MINISTER

OPENING ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER
LUMEAH DAY CARE CENTRE - MELBOURNE - 26 MAY 1985

Mr Moderator, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I welcome the opportunity of joining you today at Lumeah.

This day is the culmination of ten years dedication and commitment on the part of many people. Outstanding among them has been Virginia Davey - previously the welfare officer at Lumeah; a woman of tireless energy, she is being especially honoured today.

Back in 1975 a number of senior citizens from the Preston area were invited to share in activities at Lumeah. The number of non-resident participants grew until, by 1983, 56 people were using the Day Care Centre, in addition to those resident at Lumeah.

That success sorely strained the old facilities and made necessary the new complex we see today. It is a credit to all involved.

I am pleased the Government has been able to provide financial assistance of some \$331,000; we know that this money will be put to good use.

The challenge of meeting the growing and changing needs of the aged is one of the most important with which the Government has to reckon.

By next Century the aged will represent a larger, and a growing, proportion of Australia's total population.

We as a Government aim to ensure that their needs - the needs of the aged - are met in a way which is affordable by the aged themselves and by the rest of the community.

We are dedicated to providing a range of services for the aged which is equitable, comprehensive, balanced and cost effective.

We also wish to ensure that every aged person is able to select, with his or her relatives, the combination of services most appropriate to his or her medical, social and emotional needs.

One step the Government has taken to this end has been to place all programs for the aged in one Department. The creation of the new Department of Community Services highlights the importance the Commonwealth places on the services area and its recognition of the need to plan and co-ordinate effective action for the aged.

The setting up of the Office of Aged Care within the Department of Community Services will give particular focus to the development and implementation of the Government's policies on aged care.

Overall expenditure for the new Department in 1984/85 is likely to be over \$1600 million. Of that total, over \$1200 million will be expended on services for the aged.

- Lumeah and its various facilities will receive assistance of over \$900,000 out of this 1984/85 allocation.

Even with that high level of Government expenditure, the Federal Labor Government considers there is plenty of room to improve services for the aged.

The aged are not a uniform group; they have a wide range of needs and requirements.

To date the Commonwealth's involvement in care of the aged has been virtually limited to the provision of nursing home accommodation. Besides being very costly, such accommodation is not necessarily the most important requirement for care of the aged.

An Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey in 1980 showed that of the people aged 65 years and over who were moderately or severely handicapped, nearly three-quarters live in the community compared with only one-quarter in institutions. Other available data, including the views of older people themselves, also indicates that older people need and want more support services in the community at large.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is why the introduction of the Federal Government's Home and Community Care Program is such an important initiative.

Through this Program, and in co-operation with the

States and voluntary, Church, and community agencies, we are working towards a situation where there will be a comprehensive range of integrated home care and community based services. Although the final parameters of the Program have not yet been agreed with the States, I have already announced that the Commonwealth will be contributing \$300 million over the next three years for this integrated program.

This is not to say that we want to stop supporting nursing home care; it fulfils a vital service for the frail aged. The facilities here at Lumeah are an excellent example of what is best in this regard. Nor do we want to penalize those who are residents of nursing homes. But, as a Government, we are anxious to establish a more rational and less costly way of assisting nursing home patients.

It may come as a surprise to many of you to learn that although the Commonwealth is paying \$48.50 per day in nursing home benefits for each bed in a participating nursing home in Victoria, it is paying only \$27.80 per day in Tasmania. The other States are in between these extremes.

I think most people would regard it as a duty of their Government to do something to rationalize these nursing home benefits.

Nursing home benefits are directly related to the cost of operation. The variation in these costs is due to a variety of factors, including the different staffing requirements which are determined by State Governments. However, the Commonwealth Government and the tax payer foot the bill.

Because the community can no longer afford a widening of this discrepancy between participating nursing home costs, the Treasurer announced on 15 May that there would be a freezing of nursing home benefits in Victoria and South Australia.

This decision is an important part of the Federal Government's efforts to restrain public expenditure in pursuit of its objectives of maintaining strong growth and increased employment. It is also an important step in redirecting priorities towards developing better care services for the overwhelming number of the aged who

can, and who want to, live in their own homes.

The residents at Lumeah, a deficit funded nursing home, will not be directly affected by this recent decision to freeze the level of nursing home benefits in Victoria. You will only be marginally affected by the decision to restore the required nursing home patient contribution to the 87.5 per cent it was until last October.

In conclusion I should like to acknowledge the untiring efforts of all those organisations throughout Australia without whose selfless work no Government's aged welfare program would be able to operate.

In particular, today, I want to congratulate the Uniting Church on its efforts in this regard

- . Your nursing home, hostel, and day care centre are a very important part of the total caring network.

I now have great pleasure in declaring the Virginia Davey Day Care and Para-Medical Wing open.
