

24/08/18

**Submission on the Strategy for an Ageing Population Discussion Document.**

**1. Introduction**

1.1 This submission is made on behalf of the **Grey Power New Zealand Federation Inc.**

1.2 The contact and main author is Jan Pentecost - Email: [jan.pentecost@gmail.com](mailto:jan.pentecost@gmail.com)

1.3 The Grey Power New Zealand Federation (Inc) is a non-sectarian and non-party political, advocacy organisation that aims to advance, promote and protect the welfare and well-being of older people.

1.4 The Grey Power New Zealand Federation (Inc) is made up of some 75 individual Associations with an overall membership of approximately 68,000.

1.5 The majority of the Grey Power New Zealand Federation’s submission is based on accepted Grey Power policy, remits to annual general meetings or individual members’ comments and has been approved by the Federation Board.

1.6 Grey Power commends the Minister of Seniors for initiating a re-write of the existing Positive Ageing Strategy (PAS) and our submission, in many ways, demonstrates that our policy concurs with many of the comments made in the discussion documents and with other work which is being carried out by the government and other agencies. Our main aim is to reinforce the document discussions which coincide with our current policies and point out divergence where appropriate.

2**. Comments on Specific Questions in the Discussion document**

We do not provide a response to every question raised in the discussion document, mainly, because we do not have a direct policy or specific comment on all the issues.

The main questions we have canvassed are:

2.1 **OLDER NEW ZEALAND IS CHANGING**

Discussion document question # 1- How can the expectations and aspirations of older Maori people be best supported?

* **Member comment – “***As Maori move into older age, approaching retirement, they tend to gravitate towards their place of birth or their ancestral lands and papakainga. Many Maori who have spent the majority of their lives in cities, townships and often overseas feel a powerful force calling them back to their childhood home. To facilitate a successful relocation they require sufficient funds, access to good medical care and easy cost-effective transport links to maintain contact with their Tamariki, Mokopuna and wider Whanau.*

*Maori do not function well in isolation for the most part particularly in later years. They require regular contact with Whanau and friends. Where this is not available some form of visiting service, home visits etc is required to maintain good health. Regular Karakia (religious services) tend to play an increasing part in the lives of older Maori so contact with Church elders/Ministers and transport to and from services, or services conducted in the home plays a significant role in their lives.*

*But overall, older Maori have similar wants and needs as other ethnic groups. A warm, safe home to live in, sufficient kai, sufficient funds and most importantly to all older people quality human contact.*

*Ake ake ae”*

Discussion document question #2 - How can we respond most effectively to diversity?

* General statement - Grey Power concurs with the Auckland Council’s submission comment that New Zealand be a ‘*place where older people’s diversity is valued.’*
* **Grey Power recommends** as does the Auckland Council, that:

a)the diversity segment in the Strategy requires strengthening to recognise the whole spectrum of diversity including ethnicity, sexual orientation, spirituality etc.

b) the positive and diverse portrayal of older people in all media must be promoted. (See <http://infocouncil.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/Open/2018/08/ENV_20180814_AGN_6842_AT.htm>)

* **Member comment/recommendation** – ‘*that those working within the system have sufficient training to ensure they understand the diverse cultures involved and how the older population within each prefer to be treated.’*

2.2 **BEING RESPECTED, VALUED AND INCLUDED**

Discussion document questions - How can we make sure people continue to feel valued as they age? And how can we ensure all older people are respected and receive the help they need?

* General statement – Although the discussion document informs that *‘overall New Zealanders of all ages say they respect older people and acknowledge the value of their contribution to society’* many research projects point to ageism as a consistent issue – our own members often bring us stories of what they believe are discriminatory actions based on their age.

The over-riding concern for Grey Power, therefore, is the ageist attitudes, at a structural level, which are enmeshed within the concepts of value, respect and inclusion of older people; we believe that these attitudes permeate almost every negative issue that older people in New Zealand society face.

Ageism can undermine an older person’s health, self-respect, confidence and so on which can make them feel devalued; ageist attitudes make it easier to justify [abuse](https://www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca/home/articles/preventing-elder-abuse-and-neglect), be this physical, emotional or financial. It can also deny older people access to necessary health, income etc. help.

*‘Presbyterian Support spokesman Shaun Robinson said there was still a strong degree of ageism in New Zealand society, where the needs of elderly people were overlooked.’*(See article by Jarrod Brooker = <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10349926>.

And Leading Community Psychology Emeritus Professor John Raeburn describes the situation well when he states that:

*‘He's sad about the way older people can be treated in New Zealand and … society frequently stereotypes them as "non-productive, second-class citizens, who suck money into their pockets through Super… "They make up the highest number of suicides and can be thought of as a useless, disabled group - derelict creatures hanging from a Zimmer frame."* (see <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/aucklander/news/article.cfm?c_id=1503378&objectid=11057232>

In response to the questions posed above -

* **Grey Power recommends that** because ageism is subtle and is embedded within our everyday language; all levels of society should be encouraged to s**peak up and put a stop to ageism and elder abuse i.e.** avoid ageist comments and jokes. We should no longer tolerate ageist, racist or sexist comments or actions. (See <https://www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca/home/blog/6-ways-connect-older-person-and-prevent-ageism>)
* **Grey Power recommends that** the existing PAS # 8 = Attitudes, be retained because, as a transformative strategy, its goal is to promote positive attitudes to ageing and older people to individuals of all ages and this can be achieved by ensuring government agencies and all media advertising and publicity campaigns portray positive images of older people. Also, to promote intergenerational programmes in schools and communities, so younger people have positive attitudes to ageing. As Charles Waldegrave states, in this discussion’s supporting documents:

*“Older people have accumulated history, experience, maturity and know-how. These talents can be shared with children in classroom situations or clubs. Children can learn about ageing and older people can contribute to children with particular needs or by helping them with their homework…”*

Also, respect for older people can occur through fostering collaborative relationships between central and local government, business, non-government and community sectors that promote positive ageing and by providing opportunities for older people to share their wisdom and experiences in their communities.

* **Grey Power strongly supports the proposals provided in the age-friendly communities check-list** which encourages respect and social inclusion by proposing that:

a) older people are regularly consulted on how they can be better served by public, voluntary and commercial services;

b) older people are more visible in the media,

c) older people are depicted positively and without stereotyping,

d) community-wide settings, activities and events attract all generations by accommodating age-specific needs and preferences,

e) seniors are specifically included in community activities for “families”,

f) older people are recognized by the community for their past as well as their present contributions. (Sourced from <http://www.who.int/ageing/publications/Age_friendly_cities_checklist.pdf> )

* **Grey Power also recommends** that note is taken of the WHO global campaign to combat ageism. For this campaign to be successful “*it must tackle individual and social attitudes, stereotypes and behaviours towards people on the basis of their age, as well as the laws, policies and institutions that either perpetuate ageism or do little to stop it***.** (see <http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/96/4/17-202424/en/> )
* **Grey Power policy recommends** that voluntary labour provided by older people, which Brian Perry, in his 2017 up-date to *The Business of Ageing* project, discloses already makes a substantial contribution to the voluntary sector be included in Treasury’s reporting of the country’s economic performance.

Of interest in 2011 voluntary labour was worth $8.5b and it is projected to rise to $20b by 2031 with an hourly rate value of $16.10 in 2015 terms. (<http://www.superseniors.msd.govt.nz/documents/the-business-of-ageing-update-2015.pdf>).

The exclusion of this productive activity from New Zealand’s economy means it is invisible and that the people, including seniors, who do this unpaid work are under-valued yet as argued by the Italian-born philosopher Silvia Federici economic production is impossible without peoples’ uncompensated non-economic labour. (<https://theconversation.com/womens-unpaid-work-must-be-included-in-gdp-calculations-lessons-from-history-98110>). (Admittedly he concentrates on women’s uncompensated non-economic labour, but the principle is transferable). For example, without unpaid childcare or eldercare etc. which is often provided by grandparents and other older family members how would those in the workforce have the time or the energy to fulfil their paid work role?

All of the above will, if enacted, assist older people to feel valued, respected and connected.

2.3 **DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY**

Discussion document question- How can we help seniors access new technologies?

* General statement- as noted in the discussion document 50% of people over 85 years old and 25% aged 75-84 years of age do not use the internet for a variety of reasons including unaffordability, poor eyesight, arthritic fingers etc. and because much of the government and other agencies information is provided digitally this group of older people are seriously disadvantaged. Grey Power has consistently lobbied these agencies re this issue and several members have contacted us pointing out that they believe this situation amounts to age discrimination.

* **Member comment -** *“Help is needed for the elderly who are not computer literate because they do not own a computer or cannot afford one. Many have problems paying accounts online and making requests of various service organisations. A two-pronged approach could be to encourage senior citizens, who have retired, to offer their time at junior school levels. This could assist with the teacher aid shortage, offer invaluable life experience to the children and pick up basic computer skills from the pupils. It could also counterbalance the problem of loneliness which is occurring more frequently now.”*

Several Grey Power associations have also arranged with local high schools to run classes led by pupils to help older people use digital technology. Also, many grandchildren encourage their grandparents to adopt new technologies which is a valuable inter-generational relationship that helps arrest ageism.

* **Grey Power recommends** that these strategies and others be encouraged but that there are a group of older people who will be most unlikely to ever bridge the digital divide (access the new technology), therefore, for the near future, at least, hard copy information should be provided by government agencies etc. for them.

2.4 **WORK**

Discussion document question #1 - How can we better support older people to remain in work?

**Older people under 65 years of age**

General statement – One of Grey Power’s national policies focuses on older people who are made redundant or wish to enter or re-enter the workforce for reasons other than redundancy. Grey Power is aware, along with many others, that older people can have great difficulty re-entering the workforce after a redundancy, time out of the workforce to care for others (especially for women) and so on. Ageism in the workforce is very real (see Judith Davey - <file:///D:/New%20folder%20ageism%20in%20the%20workplace/Judith%20Davey.pdf>, <https://www.enotes.com/research-starters/aging-challenges-agism> and many other research documents.

In fact, the case study provided in the discussion document illustrates the problem clearly. We receive many similar emails from members, mainly in the 50 to 65-year-old demographic who have been made redundant, or have left the workforce for a variety of reasons and have found it impossible to re-enter it again.

A common story is that people, who did not provide their age on the job application, were short-listed for an interview for a new job but when the employer or HR person meet them they are discarded and although we do not know for certain that age was problematic, our correspondents certainly believe that this is the case and plentiful research confirms this type of discrimination is likely.

It is no surprise that older people find it difficult to re-enter the workforce when they hear comments, during a business restructuring, such as:

“*once we get rid of those grey-haired old b… this place will really sing.”*

*“grey hair means you are an endangered species if you worked for the … council”* (comment at a farewell function), and an older worker who was told he was *“way past his use by date.”*

* **Grey Power policy recommends practical government action to assist older people to re-enter the workforce by:**

a) Acknowledging the difficulties faced by older workers in obtaining another job due to ageism in the workplace and society.

b) Requesting that the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) benefit policy refrains from forcing this cohort to under-go job searches, travelling to seek work, respond to job leads or face sanctions that are inappropriate.

c)Providing specific training for Work and Income case managers re the difficulties that older people face in their attempts to enter the work-force. A more human and constructive approach is needed because many older people in this position, who have never required assistance from the state before, find themselves suffering from humiliation, loss of self-respect and financial hardship with its resultant stress seriously affecting physical and mental health. Medical professionals in a large city hospital have informed that when large workplaces announce a high number of redundancies they see an increase in admittances for heart attacks etc. which they believe are related to the stress of losing one’s livelihood.

d) Re-instating all state-funded grants, allowances and loans to enable older people to re-train as their job specifications change or to plan for second time around careers and also to engage in affordable, life-long education especially access to digital training and support.

e) Providing continued and increased support for the living wage, pay equity and increasing the income of low paid workers in the aged care sector.

d) Rescinding the 2007 amendment to the Social Security Act 1964 which meant unemployed people 60 years and over then became subject to work test sanctions.

**People over 65 years of age:**

Discussion document question #1 - What changes could employers make to help seniors stay employed or gain employment?

* General statement – Grey Power believes that people over 65 years need to be encouraged to stay in the workforce if they so wish (they will be needed as the population continues to age). We also note that in New Zealand people over 65 years-old have the second highest workforce rate in the OECD and that some people continue working after they reach their 65th birthday because they choose to do so but that others need to work because they cannot afford to stop.

(see <https://twitter.com/OECDStatistik/status/938003659484467201>).

* **Grey Power recommends that** employers be encouraged to provide age-friendly working conditions such as flexible working arrangements, part-time employment, a**dvertising job openings in newspapers in addition to online outlets, encouraging older workers to mentor younger staff and providing photos and videos of older people in recruitment marketing materials** so that prospective older employees know that they will not face age discrimination. (See <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nextavenue/2017/11/27/7-ways-employers-can-support-older-workers-and-job-seekers/#59b8aa975ff0>**)**

2.5 **PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE**

Discussion document question - What do you think would help people plan for their older years?

General comment –the Federation’s superannuation policy is that the pension is payable at age 65 years to all eligible residents, as a non-contributory, universal entitlement which is indexed to inflation and average earnings.

It is described as providing a basic standard of living and we would concur with the Retirement Commissioner that if people can they should save for retirement, however, Grey Power realises that there are many people who are unable to save because of low pay or lack of pay equity, marriage break-ups, the need to re-finance to purchase property, redundancy, and so on. And that some of these circumstances are part of the structural inequalities that mean people lack opportunities to save and to make progress in society. This impacts on their provision for retirement.

* **Grey Power recommends,** although it is a complex issue, that government monetary policy focuses more on changing New Zealand’s low wage economy because as the case study in the discussion document portrays many low paid workers are unable to save much for their retirement and decreasing home ownership will exacerbate this situation because many older people will no longer have this asset. We also recommend that the other issues, for example, unaffordable housing be the focus of continued government action.

2.6 **BEING SAFE AND FEELING SUPPORTED**

Discussion document question #1 - What would reduce older people’s risk of abuse and harm?

* General comments – Grey Power concurs with the discussion document, that some older people may perceive that the crime level is higher than it is and that perception means they feel vulnerable. Grey Power’s policy is therefore aimed at reducing our members’ feelings of vulnerability and also reducing their risk of harm
* **Grey Power policy recommends the**:

a) provision of legislation to ensure the reduction of availability of alcohol,

b) the introduction of the Law Commission Report on Alcohol Reform recommendations,

c) timelier drug and alcohol treatment,

d) provision of community projects with the purpose of preventing older persons from succumbing to scams along with police, MSD, Office of the Banking Ombudsman etc. programmes that address this issue,

e) use of publicity to encourage older people to have security devices, such as security doors and strong locks placed in their home to help prevent crime and lessen their feelings of vulnerability,

d) provision of on-going national publicity re Age Concern’s elder abuse programmes and other avenues which can be utilised either to prevent or to assist victims of elder abuse.

Discussion document question #2 - How can older people be supported to prepare for the future?

* **Grey Power recommends,** especially as it refers to preparing for the future, that older people are very aware of the necessity to appoint an Enduring Power of Attorney (EPOA), that this can be done at a low cost and that they understand and support the Human Rights Commission’s proposals that:

a)in the case of non-appointment of an EPA a welfare guardian or attorney may be appointed to act for them and that this and court orders occur quickly, especially where there is no contest or dispute;

b) those dealing with older people with diminished capacity have expertise in both assessment and documentation;

c) a framework is developed that enhances supported decision-making and ensures that supported decision-making is the default position;

d) support, training and oversight for those who have decision-making authority on behalf of another person is provided;

e) a Code of Practice for health and social service providers to operationalise the necessary safeguards is written;

f) a central register of EPOAs and Court orders is set up (Grey Power has lobbied for this for many years);

g) the current issues around different tests or thresholds for capacity in different situations is addressed;

h) the current legal safeguards for this vulnerable population be complied with and enhanced;

i) regular inspection and review of places or situations in which people might be deprived of their liberty, whether Aged Residential Care, community placements or even a person’s own home (noting that the issues arise for people of all ages with a wide range of disabilities and is not confined to ARC) occurs. (See <https://www.hrc.co.nz/files/1315/3471/5450/HRC_This_is_not_my_Home.pdf>)

* **Grey Power further recommends that** the HRC proposals be publicised and accepted so that older people will feel that they can face the future confident that if their mental and/or physical capacity is impaired they will be well protected.

2.7 **A PLACE TO CALL HOME**

Discussion document question #1in this section is what could improve the position of older renters in New Zealand?

General comments – the Population Ageing Technical Advisory Group report has disclosed that New Zealand’s housing stock is ill-prepared to cope with a growing number of pensioner tenants and that by 2021 it is likely that home ownership for people 65 and over will have dropped from the 2013 level of approximately 75% of people 65+ to below 50%. This means that as housing affordability bites and home ownership drops issues related to renting need to be addressed. (see <https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/96051225/report-says-more-should-be-done-to-help-elderly-tenants>) (2013-census-qs-65-plus.pdf). These include the poor economic, social, and health outcomes for those who rent their homes and the poor quality of New Zealand housing stock, with rental accommodation consistently in the bottom quartile. (see <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5707991/>)

* **Grey Power recommends** the following improvements:

a) mandatory and independently assessed warrants of fitness at point of sale for freehold and on a regular basis for rental properties;

b) regulation to address security of tenure by giving tenants the absolute right to remain in their home except at the direction of an independent tribunal e.g. in the case of criminal damage;

c) provision of small easily maintained properties within a recognisable community and close to the amenities to reduce housing costs;

d) utilisation of brown field sites close to existing amenities and transport hubs by central and local government as the basis for the development of social and pensioner housing.

e) developing sufficient housing both rental and freehold for long-term growth as a major priority. If this is done at sufficient scale and speed it should also beneficially reduce the cost of housing generally.

f) combating inefficient land use and rent-seeking by existing property owners by the purchase of land if necessary under the Public Works Act and creating a central Govt. agency to fund development if required.

* **Grey Power also recommends** that a key consideration for ‘Ageing in Place’ is a move away from the concept of building houses to building communities. As mentioned earlier, Grey Power fully supports the WHO Age-Friendly Cities (AFC) programme and we actively advocate for the adoption of its principles by all local bodies. We also note the congruence of many AFC principles with those of the Healthy Streets initiative that has been adopted by Greater London. We would suggest that a similar approach should be adopted in New Zealand with AFC concepts an integral part of spatial planning and a mandatory reporting framework for all local authorities, regardless of affiliation status.

NB information re this section was provided by Grey Power Federation Housing National Advisory Group Chair P. Matcham.

2.8 **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

Grey Power has provided its views on many of the questions asked in the Strategy for an Ageing Population Discussion Document and notes that health and well-being underpin many of the discussion points, however, in response to the question what else do you think is important for us to consider we want to make special mention of the existing PAS item #2 which refers to health.

Similarly, to the PAS, Grey Power health policy also mentions ‘equitable, timely, affordable and accessible public (Grey Power addition) health services for older people. This goal is very important because Grey Power has specific issues that members are concerned about. They are:

a) that for some older people health care is unaffordable, e.g. doctors’ visits, prescription charges and oral health care,

b) that for a number of older people, accessibility to elective procedures is limited and inconsistent throughout New Zealand and that even the unavailability of a simple cataract operation can have devastating effects on seniors,

c) that the amount of funding District Health Boards allocate to aged care is inconsistent throughout New Zealand and Grey Power believes it should be ring-fenced.

One final suggestion is that Grey Power, has, over a lengthy period lobbied for an aged care commissioner with wide-ranging responsibilities and authority and if the final Strategy document resembles the current PAS in any way we would recommend that a commissioner’s responsibility would extend to independent periodic review of its progress.