

Interchange Message

March 2007

Nobody could be in any doubt that we are in a Federal election year. Things are hotting up in Canberra. There has been plenty of mud slinging from both sides of the National Parliament. The Minister for Ageing, Senator Santo Santoro is one of the latest casualty. He breached the Ministerial Code of Ethics by not disclosing his share trading. Although it seems surprising, given that Sicily was his birthplace, Senator Santoro claims membership of the Uniting Church.

His most recent action as Minister for Ageing was to issue the final response of the Government to the review conducted in 2005 by Professor Warren Hogan. Although some of Professor Hogan's recommendations have been embraced, the Government has not adopted the free market model that he put forward. While Professor Hogan thought that his model would provide better choice to residents, the Government was probably concerned about its impact on costs.

At the invitation of Senator Santoro, UnitingCare Ageing produced a detailed issues paper on the future direction of aged care in Australia. We made a number of suggestions about ways in which the financial health of high care facilities could be secured. Some of the suggestions have been picked up in the response made by Senator Santoro on behalf of the Government. However, some parts of the Senator's recent announcement were so confusing that it is impossible to tell whether it will benefit either residents or providers. It is to be hoped that the new Minister for Ageing, Christopher Pyne, will provide the answers.

A lot of our work in this area does not generate publicity, but you can be sure we are always working hard to keep Government accountable and to ensure a good outcome for aged people in Australia.

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