Are our government policies and programs fit to support the diverse needs for fulfilling lives as we age?

BACKGROUND AND CURRENT ISSUE

Australia has a rapidly ageing population. Recent policy reforms continue to promote ageing in place in community and away from specialised institutions, an arrangement that is also preferred by older people themselves. The WHO’s guidance on active ageing highlights eight specific domains that promote healthy, fulfilling lives as we age, ranging from care and support services, to age-friendly built environments, and opportunities for social connections and civic participation. Less is known, however, of how policies and programs support and promote these different domains.

SUMMARY OF CURRENT RESEARCH

We reviewed 85 policy documents across Australia’s three-tiered government system to assess in what ways they support and promote active ageing. There was a notable focus on care and support programs and much less on other aspects, which likely reflects on-going reforms (though focus is primarily on residential aged care). Local governments, the WHO’s intended implementers of age-friendly support because of their familiarity of their local communities, were limited in resourcing and delegated authority to design and run suitable programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

There is continued need to move away from outdated views of old-age frailty and debilitation, towards design and support that cuts across other domains that contribute to healthy and fulfilling lives as we age. This is especially important at the local level, where most of our daily living occurs. The resourcing and capacity challenges that local governments face in responding to these needs must be supported by appropriate investments and delegation.

REFERENCES


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