

I was dismayed to read (Advertiser 31/1/) that Council is suspending high level home care packages which assist elderly residents to remain living independently at home in their communities. Under the current national aged care reforms increasing emphasis is placed on community provision as the preferred option to residential care. The Commonwealth Government's new My Aged Care program also stresses the importance of consumer directed care where residents control key decisions about service types and changing priorities. Staying - In -Portarlinton Inc. a policy, advocacy group, strongly endorses the new directions in aged care. Together with the Bellarine Aged Care Association, we hosted a series of well attended and well received forums on the Bellarine in late 2017 to inform older residents, their families, neighbours and friends about My Aged Care and the importance of consumer rights under the new program.

Victorian Councils have a long and commendable history of involvement in community care for older people in local planning, co ordination, funding and provision of services dating from the introduction of the first meals on wheels service in Victoria in 1953. We are therefore alarmed that Council, rather than championing the new directions and working with community groups to ensure good quality community care is sustained and thrives into the future for the benefit of Geelong's older residents, has instead decided to backtrack and especially at a time when demand for such services is increasing.

This does not augur well for the proposed review of all Council services. Any review of service priorities and local funding levels is not simply an internal administrative matter. State Legislation requires Council to engage with its community and Council's own Community Engagement Policy mandates that the Council will engage and work with the community. Therefore before governance decisions are taken on these matters, which are of utmost importance for community well being and quality of life for residents of all ages, it is essential that an open and transparent review process that invites and encourages community input is put in place.

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