



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Aged Care

SPEECH

Wednesday, 27 November 2019

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

<p>Date Wednesday, 27 November 2019</p> <p>Page 181</p> <p>Questioner</p> <p>Speaker O'Brien, Ted, MP</p>	<p>Source House</p> <p>Proof Yes</p> <p>Responder</p> <p>Question No.</p>
---	---

Mr TED O'BRIEN (Fairfax) (16:20): About, maybe, 20 months ago my wife and I looked over our newborn baby boy in hospital. We were waiting for his big sister to arrive so that they could meet. And, as we looked down at that miracle of life, a midwife approached us with that knowing smile that midwives often carry—such magnificent people they are—and we were unashamedly gushing with joy, as parents do. The midwife said something to us that has remained with me. She made a comment along the lines of, 'You know, you're just as vulnerable when you leave this world as you are when you enter it.' Looking down at our baby boy, who was crying, she went on to say: 'When you leave this world, you might be just as gummy. You actually may not be able to control your bowels and you may not be able to communicate what it is that you want. But when you seem to be on the other side and about to leave this world, the one thing you don't have that newborns do have is that typical doting love surrounding you.'

When the royal commission was announced, being from an electorate where nearly one in five people are over the age of 65, I decided to have forums with age-care providers, with aged-care workers and with the loved ones of clients. And, as an electorate, we put forward a submission to the royal commission. But the words of the midwife, as politically incorrect as they may have been, loomed large. A conclusion I drew was that regardless of whatever policy changes come from a royal commission, what is needed—not just from people in politics but across civil society—is a cultural shift for how we treat our elderly.

I was delighted, therefore, when the preliminary report was tabled, that the Prime Minister said:

But I want to stress again that what we really need to establish above and beyond everything else is a culture of respect for older Australians.

That's indeed true, and the substance of the government's response follows through with that sentiment. It's a response that focuses particularly on three areas: the first is more home care packages; secondly, better management of medicine and physical restraint; and, thirdly, helping transition young people out of residential aged care. There is no doubt that more will need to be done, and the government acknowledges that. But we continue to step up and to do everything we possibly can. That's why this royal commission is so important and that the substance of the government's response is delivering adequately to it.

What has concerned me about this debate today has been the shrilling we've heard from the Labor Party around this issue. They've talked about the need for leadership, but being a leader, surely, is at least being good to your word. Showing respect to the elderly is surely at least about telling them the truth about their sector. But what we have heard from members opposite today has been a complete lack of respect for seniors. They have demonstrated their incapacity to lead.

In 2012-13 the whole-of-government funding to aged care from the Labor Party was \$13.3 billion. In 2018-19 it was \$21.6 billion—an increase of 60 per cent. These are actual figures. Home care funding from Labor in 2012-13 was \$1.1 billion. It was \$3.4 billion from the coalition in 2018-19. That's an increase by three times. Home care packages have more than doubled under the coalition, yet we've had those members opposite prepared to absolutely disrespect the elderly by coming to this chamber and telling untruths. This government is taking the reforms necessary. We will continue to listen to the royal commission.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hogan): The time for the discussion has concluded.