



Speech by

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**OLDER WOMEN'S WELLNESS CENTRE, TOWNSVILLE**

**Ms NELSON-CARR** (Mundingburra—ALP) (11.18 p.m.): At a recent women's forum in Townsville, 240 older women unanimously endorsed the proposal to establish an Older Women's Wellness Centre in the city. This innovative and exciting idea for achieving a sense of wellbeing in older women is a result of the view that health is not just the absence of disease; it is influenced by socioeconomic, social, physical and emotional factors. Older women know best their own health needs. Wellness is an attitude and wellness is about being interested in life, being active and developing physical, emotional and intellectual potential. Townsville women are putting these principles into practice and will begin running sessions in November which will tap into older women's potential to stay "weller" longer.

This beginning is possible with the collaboration and cooperation of local women's groups and especially workers from the local Women's Health Centre and the North Queensland Combined Women's Services. To ensure this modest beginning can follow the developmental model that has been devised by the hardworking reference group members for this project, the group will be looking for support.

Older women are saying that this is what they want: to be able to come together at least one day a week to join in a schedule of activities designed to focus on the whole person and to nurture a sense of physical, intellectual, emotional and social wellbeing. This makes sense for Governments, for whom the wellness and wellbeing of the older population is an economically sound proposition. It makes sense to focus on older women because women live longer than men and we need them to stay well longer, as they remind us. We need to support local initiatives such as the Townsville model, ensuring that the Women's Health Centre is resourced for this purpose.

The older women say that they believe that a wellness centre will complement other activities that are currently conducted locally. They say that, with a greater sense of wellbeing, they will have more vigour and vitality to invest in everything else that they do. These women want to age outrageously, which they can best do with a sense of wellbeing generated through wellness centre projects. We should support them in every way we can and encourage older women throughout the State where they, too, want to start such projects.

A recent discussion paper produced by the national Older Women's Advocacy group, the Older Women's Network, identified four main concerns for older women: attitudes, wellness and wellbeing, older women's participation in decision making, and communication. Many older women's groups around Australia are initiating wellness programs, including developing skills required for managing the ongoing strategies involved in such programming. In 1993, OWN carried out research into the health of older women. Those interviewed talked about retirement or having fewer responsibilities around the home as their children leave to make their own lives and the fact that they often felt at a loose end and even stagnating. Many said that they felt that the rest of society perceived them to be a homogenous group with little faith or confidence in their own diversity, skills, roles, cultural identity and social or geographical isolation. Some women said that they were often confined to the home not only because of ill health such as diabetes or arthritis but also because of the social shame of common conditions such as incontinence. With that in mind, these same women said that although their physical health had deteriorated, they wanted more than physical good health to feel good. They wanted to look on the positive side of their lives and accentuate them rather than concentrating on the negatives.

Since 1993, OWN has been involved in developing and implementing wellness practices for older women. Since 1990, an Older Women's Wellness Centre has been operating in Bankstown and North Sydney. The focus is not just on good physical health but also the whole being and self-reliance. Their activities include yoga, Tai Chi, Feldenkrais and international dance and massage and discussion groups on depression and motivation, body changes, meditation, handling fear and keeping well. They have classes on all nature of things, including calligraphy and even writing autobiographies.

The success of the Sydney wellness groups is based on their ability to attract funding in helping to reduce isolation and the loss of family support for many of their members. Women in the group organise, run and publicise their activities. Providing more services for older women is an obvious priority and the Wellness Network can fill the gaps left in services and provisions without duplication.

The Townsville City Council's women's forums and advisory committee have offered their support to create a wellness network in Townsville in order to identify the many positive factors that we associated with ageing. Wellness centres look at prevention as a much more desirable model than the traditional illness cure models. It is about older women defining a need and working out and putting into practice a sensible strategy. The wellness and wellbeing of the ageing population is an economically sound proposition and worthy of support.

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