

# **THE VOICE of Pensioners and Superannuants**

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## **Aged care: why medication reviews are not popular in nursing homes**



THE smart thing for a nursing home to do when a new resident comes in is to review their medication. On average, nursing home residents are taking ten different medications every day, plus short-term medicines like antibiotics. Taking lots of medications, but also age-related changes, can make older frail people susceptible to problems with medicine. A medicine review is important.

A Residential Medication Management Review is a free service for which every permanent nursing home resident is eligible. It is conducted by a pharmacist. The review is comprehensive and identifies, resolves and prevents medication-related problems.

However, only one in five aged care residents receives a medication review within 90 days of entering an aged care facility, a new study shows, even though it's free to the resident and to the nursing home.

The research from the Registry of Senior Australians at the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute analysed the data of 143,676 residents across all 2,799 aged care facilities nationally between 2012 and 2015.

Not all nursing homes performed the same. For example, there were 300 nursing homes which never had any medication reviews done, while only four did reviews as recommended, 100 per cent of the time. Six per cent of nursing homes carried out reviews on more than half of all new residents got a medication review.

Yet, the Residential Medication Management Review has been around for more than 20 years.

The researchers want awareness about the Residential Medication Management Review to be raised. This is certainly a good idea, particularly awareness among family members and residents themselves, so that they can ask for a medication review.

However, the research spanned 2012 to 2015 and looked at nursing homes before the Aged Care Royal Commission did and found that that psychotropic drugs were massively over-prescribed in nursing homes to drug people with dementia and behavioural issues related with their condition.

Geriatrician Edward Strivens said the drugs were useful in about 10% of cases, but that up to 80 per cent of dementia patients are taking some form of psychotropic drug.

“The side effects will often outweigh the possible benefits,” Strivens told an aged care royal commission hearing.

CPSA believes that it is very likely the low utilisation rate of Residential Medication Management Reviews may have been caused by nursing homes not wanting to know that they were harming residents in their care.

### **Does Centrelink terrorise pensioners?**



IN Question Time, the federal Member for Clark, Andrew Wilkie, asked the Prime Minister if Centrelink was “terrorising pensioners” using “demonic algorithms bombarding the elderly with reams of threatening and confusing correspondence”.

Was there now a Robodebt for pensioners, Mr Wilkie asked, referring to Centrelink's Automation of Income Stream reviews.

An income stream is any income you get periodically from, for example, a superannuation pension, from an annuity or a defined benefit income stream.

Centrelink collects information from income stream providers electronically and compares this with information it has about social security recipients provided by social security recipients themselves. Because income streams are generally retirement income streams, Age Pensioners are the largest group affected.

The problem many older people have in complying with requests for updated information is that they are asked to go online to provide it. Many older people are not online.

In his response to Mr Wilkie's question, the Prime Minister pointed out that people did not need to go online. They could also ring up. A phone number was provided.

Nothing to see here, in other words.

However, the Prime Minister was extremely disingenuous in his response.

While there is a Centrelink phone number for people unable to go online, anyone who has ever tried to call Centrelink knows what a nightmare that can be.

Long waiting times.

Being cut off while waiting.

Having to go through all the waiting and being cut off again when additional information is required.

Unless pensioners respond in a timely manner with Centrelink requests for information about their income streams, they risk having their pension reduced or cut altogether.

But, effectively, the only way for pensioners to comply is by going online. This means that those unable to go online are being terrorised, even though income stream reviews are different from Robodebt, where Centrelink would simply raise a debt, which had to be paid or disproved by the social security recipient.

Income stream reviews are a different kind of terror for pensioners who can't go online.

## Cashless Welfare Card for Cape York Age Pensioners voted through



THE Cashless Debit Card (the Card) trial has been extended for another two years until 31 December 2022. You may be forgiven for not knowing the Cashless Debit Card program is a trial as it has been given a trial life much longer than others, with trials beginning in 2016.

Although it is disappointing to see the program extended, it could have been worse. The Australian Government's initial proposal was to make the Card permanent in the trial regions, but this did not gain support in the Federal Senate, so the Government compromised and settled for a two-year extension.

Age Pensioners are excluded from being forced onto the Card in all the trial regions except in Cape York. In Cape York, the Family Responsibilities Commission (FRC) can refer Age Pensioners to be put on the Card. The FRC does not support the exclusion of Age Pensioners from being put on the Card by compulsion so it is possible every Age Pensioner in the Cape York region could be forced onto the Card.

It is also troubling that the Card received this extension without the release of an evaluation of the program. The Australian Government commissioned the University of Adelaide to evaluate the program, this evaluation was meant to be

released by the end of 2019. However, the completed evaluation report is yet to be released by the Government.

On 7 December 2020, the Guardian published an article in which a researcher from the University of Adelaide team that evaluated the Card found that there is “little consensus” the Card is fulfilling its aims of reducing drug and alcohol abuse. The Guardian reported that the researcher also said “criminal activity had increased” since the introduction of the Card and the researcher believed this was linked to the “financial abuse, fraud and exploitation” of people, particularly older people.

CPSA suspects that not releasing the report that evaluated the Card before forcing legislation through Parliament suggests the findings of this report do not support the continued use of the Card.

## **Waterloo History Research Project**



My name is Catherine Stuart and I’m studying towards a Master of History qualification at the University of New England. In 2021, I’m doing a one-year research project on the Sydney suburb of Waterloo in the 1960s and 1970s when the current public housing estate there was built.

I’m looking for people who have memories of Waterloo in the 1960s and 1970s and who are interested in being interviewed for my research. I’m also interested in photos of Waterloo from that time.

Please contact me for further details on: phone – 0439 084 657 or email - [waterloohistory@ihug.com.au](mailto:waterloohistory@ihug.com.au).

About me: I have worked in the areas of tenancy and social housing for twenty-five years. I worked at CPSA for a couple years in the late 1990s. I worked at Housing NSW for almost twenty years and now I have my own business called Lee Road Consulting ([www.leeroadconsulting.com.au](http://www.leeroadconsulting.com.au)).