Aged Care Diversity Framework

Resource Sheet 16
People in Rural, Remote and Very Remote Areas

According to the Australian Standard Geographical Classification System, the terms 'rural, remote and very remote' refer to all areas outside Australia's major cities. It is accepted that people living in these areas have less access to goods and services than residents of the major cities.

About 69% of Australians live in major cities, 20% in inner regional areas, 9% in outer regional areas and 1.5% and 0.8% in remote and very remote areas. Inner and outer regional areas have significantly higher proportions of residents aged over 65. 40% of people aged 70-74 live outside capital cities compared to 25% of 25-29 year olds.

According to the Journal of Rural Health, people aged 80-84 living in remote and very remote areas use home care services at almost three times the rate of their major cities counterparts.

Older people living in these areas can experience multiple areas of disadvantage including:

- health inequities due to ongoing challenges in recruiting health and medical professionals; less access to medical, dental, allied health and hospital services; higher levels of social isolation; increased risk of suicide; poorer health outcomes and lower life expectancy
- socio-economic disadvantage that increases with remoteness due to less access to employment and education; proneness to natural disasters like drought, flood and fire; higher costs of goods, services, transport, tradespeople, etc
- access, choice and affordability barriers to aged care services due to the increased costs of the distances involved; reduced viability for for-profit services; less choice in aged care providers; lack of access to close-by residential aged care; and challenges in recruiting suitable staff.

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There are additional challenges for older people in rural, remote and very remote who cross other diversity groups (e.g. LGBTI elders, people from CALD backgrounds). The relatively small size of these communities means that they may be more isolated from support networks and specialised services than in more heavily populated areas.

Older people in these areas often have developed strong resilience and self-reliance mechanisms. They can be accustomed to doing more with less and be skilled at finding creative solutions to everyday challenges. Sometimes this can mean that there is a reluctance to ask for help or to accept home care and support services.

General Strategies to address access and engagement challenges

- Improving access to on-line support and information (e.g. Telehealth, telemonitoring)
- Training and supporting a multi-skilled workforce
- Increased across-agency collaboration and cooperation
- Higher levels of support for carers
- An increased focus on time limited reablement and restorative care
- Innovation and flexible approaches to care beyond traditional service provision

For further information, see **Sheet 17: Resources – Resource Nos. 2, 4, 7, 22, 24, 26, 38**