MEDIA RELEASE

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INVESTING IN AGED CARE SERVICES IN OUR COMMUNITIES

The Howard Government has underlined its commitment to choice in aged care with a range of initiatives that support the provision of care to elderly Australians living independently in their communities.

The Minister for Ageing, Senator Santo Santoro, said it was vital that Australians be allowed to choose the level of support they needed as they grew older.

“When we have traditionally thought of aged care as being provided in aged care homes, this government has also focused its attention on the need to support older people who wish to continue living in their own homes, close to their communities, family, friends and amenities.

“This reflects the Government’s commitment to the principle of choice and expands the range of options available to people when making decisions about their own futures.”

- Improving arrangements for aged care assessments and access to Home and Community Care services – $24.2 million over five years

This measure will result in improvements to the Aged Care Assessment programme which will ensure timelier, more consistent and accountable assessments for frail older people requiring care services, by December 2007. Access to the Home and Community Care (HACC) programme will also be improved through joint work with the states and territories to simplify entry and improve eligibility and assessment processes.

The Council of Australian Governments agreed to these changes in February 2006. The Australian Government is providing funding of $24.2 million over five years (including $0.1 million in 2005-06) for improved performance management of Aged Care Assessment Teams. Aged Care Assessment Teams are the gatekeepers for the Australian Government’s $6.9 billion investment in aged care.

The Council of Australian Governments also endorsed the joint work by the Commonwealth and the states and territories to improve access to HACC services. This work is a part of the reforms set out in A New Strategy for Community Care – The Way Forward.
- **Aged Care Assessment Programme – continue age related growth indexation – $20.1 million over four years**

As Australia’s population ages, demand for assessments to access appropriate aged care services is rising. The Government’s commitment to funding of $20.1 million over four years will assist Aged Care Assessment Teams to keep pace with the increasing demand for their services.

- **Community aged care viability supplement in rural and remote areas – $19.4 million over four years**

Aged care services in rural and remote areas face higher costs for goods and services, and difficulties in attracting and training staff. Aged care homes in these areas can already access a viability supplement to offset such higher costs.

This new measure will provide a similar supplement to providers of Community Aged Care Packages, Extended Aged Care at Home (EACH) and EACH Dementia programmes. It will benefit more than 4,000 people receiving this community aged care each year.

New funding of $19.4 million over four years will enable providers to deliver care more comparable to the services offered in capital and regional cities.

- **Care services in retirement villages – continue funding of $24.2 million over four years**

This funding will continue the Government’s commitment to improve access to community care for people living in retirement villages by assisting them to access the same forms of community care as are available in the wider community.

The Minister announced this measure on 3 May 2006.

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