

National Meal Guidelines released against backdrop of Funding Uncertainty

Speech delivered by AMOWA President Nelson Mathews at Parliamentary Friends of Meals on Wheels event, Parliament House, Canberra, Wednesday 15th February 2017.

Welcome. Thank you to Mr Mark Coulton MP, Member for Parkes and Mr Brian Mitchell MP, Member for Lyons, for organising this event today.

We're assuming if you're here today you are 'friends' and understand our slogan "More Than Just A Meal" We are three services in one. 1) we provide nutrition, 2) we monitor, or provide a safe and well-being check - and anyone in this room with loved ones getting meals knows how important that is - and 3) connect and strengthen communities. This last point might sound a little fuzzy, but I'll return to it ...

Since we were last here 18 months ago-

-We have negotiated a very significant transition - from HACC to being embedded in the new Commonwealth Home Support Program framework. There have been multiple issues to work through. The challenges have been considerable to say the least.

Despite that - we have not stopped progressing ...

-We've developed links with MOW America, and being privy to their research as well as other local and international research (that deals with the positive social and financial impacts of MOW).

-Developed a New Website, and you will be pleased to know ...

-Our 'brand' MOW, as well as our logo and the phrase 'More Than Just A Meal' have been trademarked.

-We have also developed a world first; contemporary and innovative meal guidelines for MOW and centre based meals, which have involved both grass roots and dietetic academic input. These were developed with the Smart Foods Centre at Wollongong University.

With so much going on ... there's been a lot of talking, along with constructive and vigorous debate. A major theme has emerged; We think WE may have undersold the financial and social benefits of MOW.

Consider this- MOW has traditionally been a service where the recipient or 'consumer' has paid the most contribution to the cost of the service, often up to 75%. You take that, and the relatively small government contribution, marry that with the MOW model, and you enable a co-operative community endeavour that mobilises volunteer resources that work together to help those within their community. That's gold.

Referring back to my reference about the 3 services in 1 and in particular the 3rd ... Connecting and Strengthening Communities. Our volunteers consistently say that they get more than they give. That in-itself is a health and well-being benefit for 75,000 Australians.

Or looking at it from another angle ...

My fellow AMOWA board member, Chris Watt from NSW, relayed this story to me yesterday ... Some of his MOW volunteers were particularly concerned about one of their clients. He was drinking day and night, and his health seemed to be deteriorating. He was in, what they referred to, a 'down-hill' slide. They decided to help by finding him a new mattress, and a few other household items he really needed. This was done as community members, and did not involve any formal interaction with a welfare agency, or for that matter MOW coordination staff. It was just local people helping another local. He walked into the MOW offices the other day and told them he had not had a drink in 3 months, and thanked them for getting his life back on track. He explained that the key to recovery was not the household items, but the 'trigger' or turning point was knowing that people cared.

However, it's true to say, that in some cases volunteer resources are stretched – *which is why we are currently agitating for proper and appropriate funding* - the same work ethic and commitment that ensures that last year during an electricity blackout in SA not one person missed out on a meal, or during floods in TAS volunteers moved heaven and earth to ensure people were fed ... *applies every single day.*

Volunteers won't turn people away They will just work harder.

Some work coordinating services for over 35 hours a week.

In some instances, they're in danger of burning out or disengaging altogether. I'd say that's a very dumb outcome and not one anyone of us would want.

So bottom line. What AMOWA wants- 4 things.

1. Acknowledgement of the health outcomes achieved by Meals on Wheels and the downstream savings generated.
2. The provision of realistic and appropriate funding to create certainty about the future of MOW in Australia.
3. We want \$300,000 to ensure AMOWA has the resources to work effectively with the Gov. to deliver the necessary reforms to come and streamline the administrative overheads to MOW and Government. Note: *As board members some of us get paid by our State bodies to participate, others simply volunteer all their time.*
4. In the 2017 budget provide an increase in base funding for MOW services of \$5 million dollars (an average of .50c a meal) which will relieve pressure on volunteers, stop many services operating at a deficit, address funding inequities, and avoid unaffordable price-hikes for those who can least afford it.

The Minister for Aged Care and Minister for Indigenous Affairs, the Hon. Ken Wyatt AM MP, then formally launched the guidelines and talked about his personal experience with Meals on Wheels.

Nelson then briefly thanked those involved ...

I'd like thank the Project Leader from Wollongong University and the Project Steering Group, who added so much to the project due to their professional diversity. These guidelines are not prescriptive and old-fashioned. Eating is not just about nutrition, it's about good food. For example, we've recommended adding cream to desserts!

Thank you

