



## THE HON KEN WYATT AM, MP

Minister for Senior Australians and Aged Care  
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### TRANSCRIPT

**Ken Wyatt:** ... being born. At each stage in your life, you are continuing towards the journey of 100 years of living. More Australians are living beyond 100. Today, we have somewhere between 3500 to 5000 people who are over 100 years of age. You would have read in the paper today, one of our senior Australians is 108, living in Brisbane. But by 2050 there will be 20-30,000 Australians who will be over the age of 100. We are living longer and we are living better. And organisations like yours enables people to fully realise the enjoyment of life that you've set out on. That everything that you do should not be limited by a mindset that our nation has that when you're 60 you're old – because we're not. Our intellect, our capacity, our abilities, what we've accumulated over the years of living is not diminished nor detract [sic] by aging. The only impediment we have, if we think about living on a journey of 0 to 100 is that we only need the health system or aged care services when we need them. But every other element of our life is about living independently, living it fully, and enjoying all those moments of connectivity that you have.

I grew up in a country town. What I love about country towns is they are a community hub because everybody gets to know each other. They support each other, they provide a range of events within their community that keeps them engaged. What I loved about the Waverton Hub when I first went there was the fact that a small group decided to identify everybody over the age of 50, and they went and knocked on every door and introduced themselves and said we belong to the community of Waverton. It's a busy little suburb just north of North Sydney. And then what they did is exactly what you've done, they engaged people to become connected and they looked after each other. And for a capital city, that is unique because we tend to, at the end of a day, go home, shut our door. One time we used to know all our neighbours. We don't any more. One time we used to celebrate in the street as a number of people celebrating a particular event.

What strikes me as a federal member are the number of people I've met who are lonely. When I door knock I meet people who hang on to your hand for quite a while. If they hang on to your hand for a while, you know they have not had a conversation with another human being. Or a person I write to and send a birthday card, and they ring and say yours is the first birthday card I've had in 20 years. And the element of loneliness- we were never meant to be lonely as people. But what is great is that this is the first hub similar to Waverton Hub, in Western Australia. And when I saw it being televised on television, just a few weeks ago, I thought wow, we've got our first

hub in WA and it's in the backyard where I'm living right now. I just live down the other end of Mackie Street so I come past here frequently.

But what I also appreciate is the way in which you are looking after each other at a time in life when sometimes we become frail. All of us have minds that tell us we're young. We'd still like to leap over the backyard fence, but our body won't do that anymore. There are things that we think we can do when we climb up a ladder and start painting, and then suddenly realise that your shoulders are sore as you start to paint. Or you go for a long walk and then your knee starts to ache. But that doesn't stop the [audio interrupted - sneeze] that is within you. That is the beauty of a human being, is that we still have that get up and go and passion.

And in the last budget I said to the Prime Minister we need to focus on three things; better access to aged care, better access to quality care, but more importantly better aging. I said we don't have those discussions in this country. We talk about football and the cricket, the Scorchers winning last night or our soccer teams but we don't talk about what happens when we take that journey to 100 years. If I said to you, you can go overseas but you're not allowed to plan for it, most of you would find that challenging. And yet in life we don't plan for the journey of becoming 100 years. As a minister I've met children who say to me I hope I've done the right thing by mum or dad, his GP or her GP has told me to put them into residential care. And they've said to me I do not want to go but they've been forced to put them into residential care, and they said I wished that they had told me what their thinking and their planning was.

But I think the thing that you're doing, and the activities I've seen there –I might enrol in that one about sleeping better than what I currently do, because it'll help. But you're starting to engage in a whole range of things that sometimes we don't do enough of. What I used to also like as a child, and sometimes when you walked past people in the street you'd say hello to them and they'd smile back and say hello. We don't do enough of that. What I see in other countries overseas are people who are in their 90s still active, tilling the soil. Our farmers in the bush, I've seen farmers who are well and truly in their 90s still working the land but they're helped by their sons. And then I go into an aged care facility and look at somebody who's sat in a chair at the age of 65, and when you sit for too long you waste muscle and you waste mobility. And you're breaking that by doing what you are involved in.

Your hub is going to give a lot of enrichment for so many people. If you strive for that number 400, then multiply that number by at least five because those 400 members will talk to other families about what you do. And those families are going to say well, why haven't we got a hub like this in our community? Because what you've done is you've taken away the notion that I live in the suburb of Victoria Park. What you're talking about is I live in a community in Victoria Park where we have fun, where we connect. And you're talking about the very thing that centres on you as an individual being part of the lives of others.

If you think back to your youth, you would've belonged to a whole range of organisations. You would've engaged in football teams, netball teams- all sorts of teams. But as we get older, we don't do enough about it. Men, in particular, when they finish work, tend not to have the collection of friends that they once had in the workplace, because you become disengaged. I go to men's sheds and men's sheds

say to me: the best thing that ever happen to me was for me to be involved with another group of guys. It's interesting when you meet the wives, because the wives say: I took him to the men's shed because he was getting under my feet.

[Laughter]

But it's given him a lease of life that I've not seem in him for a while. Let me share this with you, as I go towards my conclusion. I know a gentleman who used to write to me every single day about the aircraft that flew over his home. And I thought: there's got to be more to this than just noise of a plane - [clears throat] excuse me - so I went and saw him, and what it was, what the circumstances were, it was a man who had retired through his work. His wife had passed away, and he had nothing else to focus on. So I got him involved with the Kalamunda Men's Shed. Since then, I've not had a single email or letter from him, because he is doing something that engages him. And so I want to congratulate every one of you for being part of a hub, being part of a community that supports each other. But more importantly, becoming beacons for what I hope to achieve as a minister around this nation, and that is more hubs where we reengage people with each other.

I often say in conclusions of a lot of my speeches to younger people: I want you to think about your mother and father, when you were young, they held you, and nurtured you, and told you that they loved you. And the first time I said it to a group of people, I finished by saying: when was the last time you held your mother and said, mum, I love you. I want to thank you for what you've done; or your father? And [indistinct], I went to the airport the next morning, I was with my senior adviser, we had one of the guys who was in the audience come over and he said to me: I was in the audience, you won't know who I am. But he said after you talked about your message, I went and ring my mum and so I said to mum: I want to tell you that I love you. And she was quiet and she said: what have you done or what have you [indistinct]?

[Laughter]

And he said: no, no. And he explained to her why. And he said: I haven't done that for a long, long time. And then she said: son, that really means a lot to me. And he now- I caught up with him recently, and he says he does that frequently, and he sees his parents much more. But his father, when he ringed his father, just responded by saying: well, what the hell's wrong with you, what are you on, what have you been drinking? And he said: no, no, dad. He said: I have never taken the time to tell you that you did a lot for me, and I want to thank you. And he said what he's done is he's taken that away and now he talks to other people about reconnecting with the elders of our nation.

And you are the elders of our nation because you built everything that we take for granted. Your hard work over the years has given us what's in the suburbs of Perth. It doesn't matter what job you did; it all contributed. We need to acknowledge that. Women who raised children made a tremendous contribution in skilling the young people who have now become those who've replaced them, in both the homes and in the workforce. What's interesting for Australia – and I'll finish on this point – is in the last Census, there was 24 million Australians in the 2016 Census. Of that 24 million, 11.2 are over the age of 55. That's nearly half the population now that are

eligible for membership with you. But the other part to this is that the population ageing bulge will not be reached until the current 40-year-old cohort become the 55s. And that is significant. So the skills that you have, the knowledge you have, and the ability you possess to contribute back to your community are absolutely important in the future that we have in going forward, that we have as a nation.

So, congratulations on your first birthday. I take note of the fact that you have been around for some time; you have the distinguished position of being the first senior's centre. You are now more distinguished by being the first hub in this state. And I congratulate Gary (\*), yourself. I also congratulate all of the board members, and all of those who are involved in shaping this. And I want to thank Lotterywest as well. You play a magnificent role in supporting our community for the very things that are important and dear to all of us. And you help us with both the combination of logic and the heart. What I see in The Hub is the heart, supported by logic. So, congratulations on your first birthday, and I wish you well in the next 25 years and your journey through. Well done.

[Applause]

**ENDS**