



**“At the roots of the throwaway culture  
the elderly steal our future”**

# Aging and Elderly Care in Australia

Bishop Timothy Harris

# Profile of the Elderly in Australia



- High life expectancy
  - 83.6 years – ranked 9<sup>th</sup> by United Nations 2022
  - 16% of population is elderly (23% by 2066)
- Good health and standard of living
- Disability
  - 49.6% have a disability
- Living arrangements
  - Most live at home
  - 1 in 20 over 65 in aged care
  - 1 in 4 over 85 in aged care
- Government support
  - Pensions, healthcare subsidies, aged care services

# Attitudes Towards the Elderly

- High regard amongst indigenous peoples and migrant groups
  - Multigenerational households
- Australian born
  - More independent, individualism
- Older workers
  - Perceived to be lacking in skills
- Social isolation
  - Excluded from social activities
- Resentment
  - Blamed for economic difficulties of young
    - “if mum stops breathing, I’m not resuscitating – I’m going house hunting”*

# Problems with care for the elderly



- Royal Commission into aged care (Government inquiry) 2020 found:
  - 1 in 3 received substandard care
  - Between 13% and 18% experienced assault
  - Systemic problems
- Australian Institute of Family Studies 2021 (for all elderly)
  - 1 in 6 reported abuse over 12 month period
    - Psychological abuse 12%
    - Neglect 2.9%
    - Financial abuse 2.1%
    - Physical abuse 1.8%
    - Sexual abuse 1.0%
  - 1 in 2 perpetrators are a family member
  - 1 in 3 sought help from a third party
  - 1 in 3 experienced age discrimination
  - 1 in 5 over age 65 experienced age discrimination in workplace

# Euthanasia



- Available to Australians over 18 years in most Australian jurisdictions
- Key drivers of euthanasia
  - Loneliness
  - Fear of being a burden
  - 1 in 10 older Australians had symptoms of depression
  - Those aged 75-85 lowest rate of use of mental health services
- Lack of resourcing for Palliative Care
- *To Witness and to Accompany with Christian Hope*
  - Response of Church in Australia to euthanasia
  - Guidance to families, healthcare professionals, pastoral workers

# Challenges for the Church



- Conscientious objection not an option for Catholic facilities (Queensland, NSW and South Australia)
- Offence to attempt to persuade someone to reverse decision for euthanasia (Queensland)
- Attempts to change Crimes Act to allow counselling for euthanasia by phone/internet (this is currently illegal)
- Certain ideologies objecting to provision of healthcare by religious organisations
- Compulsory acquisition of Catholic hospital by government (Australian Capital Territory)

# Upholding infinite dignity

- Church second largest provider of healthcare in Australia
- Determined to continue the healing ministry of Christ
- Strengthen families and society to provide care for the elderly