

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

DATE: MONDAY 1 OCTOBER 2007

ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



Researchers to improve ageing in rural regions

University of Tasmania research to ensure Australia's ageing population remain social assets and not burdens, has received \$290,000 in Federal Government funding.

The Australian Research Council's Linkage Project scheme has awarded the grant to the University's Rural Healthy Ageing Research Team through the Rural Clinical School.

The three-year study will focus on rural regions in Tasmania as the basis for national strategy development.

Chief Investigator, Professor Judi Walker said the project was innovative and highly significant because it brings together key agencies representing consumers, service providers and policy makers and researchers. The project has also secured funding and resources from the State Government's Department of Health and Human Services and the Tasmanian Council of Social Services.

Research will address the looming social and economic challenges flowing from an ageing population by addressing triggers to social disengagement and design service frameworks that can be used before people become isolated and dependent.

It is projected that more than a quarter of the Australian population – about 7.2 million people – will be 65 or older by 2050. Based on forecasts an older population will increase the national health bill from 1.4% of the population in 2000-01 to 8% by 2044-45.

Professor Walker said these trends will dominate rural regions where the outward migration of younger people and arrival of later life 'seachangers' would exacerbate an already older population profile.

She said services are currently focused on caring for the frail, but to meet the ageing challenge support strategies need to be developed to ensure older rural people are socially active to improve health and longevity.

“For almost one-third of people aged 65 and older who live in rural and remote areas the challenges of ageing are compounded by poorer underlying health and mortality figures, rapid change and the decline of an already inequitable service base,” she said.

Copies of the project description can be obtained from Prof. Walker.

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