

CHAPTER 4

HEALTH AND WELL BEING



Health of Older People: A caregiver helps an older person with grooming at the Zibambeleni Old Age Home in Clermont Kwazulu-Natal

4.1 Health Policies for Older Persons

For many decades the vast majority of the population were denied access to adequate health care services and in 1994 the government inherited a highly fragmented health sector. The transformation of health services to redress inequalities in health status has therefore been a high priority of the government since 1994.

The legal situation with regard to health services has changed and Section 27 of the Constitution states that “Everyone has the right of access to health care services....and no one may be refused emergency medical treatment”. As a first step government introduced free public primary health care for all children under the age of six years and to all pregnant women. Free public primary health care has subsequently been extended to all South Africans. The use of hospitals is presently means-tested and provision has been made for free services to all indigent people. The Department of Health is in the process of standardising their fee structures which will include free services to all people in receipt of social grants.

The National Department of Health produced the Patients’ Rights Charter in 1999 as a common standard for achieving the realisation of health rights under the Constitution.

The National Department of Health has also produced a range of health promotion policies and guidelines, some specific to older persons and others are inclusive of older persons.