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Balancing Pluralism

New Welfare Mixes in Care for the Elderly

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It is now widely recognized that the provision of social welfare involves a great deal more than state social services. In many countries there is increasing attention paid to the role of the family and the voluntary sector as well as to market mechanisms. Across the political spectrum there is a search for a better balance and mix of providers. There is also uncertainty and conflict over the values and principles that should inform the mixed economy of welfare. Different countries have different traditions and problems. There are difficult choices to be made about the right balance between state and private responsibility, between equality and diversity and between public planning and individual choice.

This book seeks to help this debate by focussing on an area where the challenge for social welfare is most urgent – the provision of care and assistance to older people. It is the product of a series of collaborative meetings organized by the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research.

Part I contains chapters dealing with broad problems and issues: the theoretical questions that arise; general lessons to be drawn from experience in particular countries; the changing role of the state as regulator and enabler; the special characteristics of social care services.

Part II provides case-studies of provision for older people in nine countries. They focus particularly on reforms and innovations: more sensitive use of the informal sector; building synergies of public and private provision; the problems of cash-driven links between the sectors such as care allowances and individual care budgets; the significant role of users and carers in coordinating fragmented provision; the special difficulties in building pluralism in the post-communist nations.

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