

State Election 2010

a fair go for
Senior South Australians



SA ELECTION 2010 A FAIR GO FOR SENIOR SOUTH AUSTRALIANS



COTA Seniors Voice is seeking a range of initiatives from the incoming State Government that will redress inequity and ageism currently experienced by older South Australians.

Ageism is still widespread. It has negative effects on individuals but it also has major impacts on the community resulting in lost productivity and potential contributions from older people, and additional costs in healthcare, community services and income support.

Addressing ageism and age discrimination requires a whole of government policy framework, based on older people enjoying full citizenship rather than living a discounted life. Governments have important leadership roles to play in changing community attitudes.

Concessions

COTA Seniors Voice is seeking:

- **An immediate 20% increase in the value of concessions for energy and then their indexation in line with price increases**
- **An increase in the water concession from 20% to 40%**
- **A 20% increase in the value of the cap on concessions on local government rates**

COTA Seniors Voice regrets that at the end of its second term the Rann Government has not undertaken a comprehensive review of concessions to enable it to introduce a sustainable and equitable concessions regime.

A number of key concessions are rarely increased and lose their real value over time. This is poor public policy. Key examples are energy and council rates concessions.

The energy concession is not indexed and has not increased since 2003. At the same time the electricity CPI has risen by 14.4% and supply charges by more than 21%, while the gas CPI has risen by 20% and supply charges by more than 26%.

The poorest 20% of Australian households, of which older people make up a large proportion, pay 7 times more as a proportion of income for their energy than do people with better incomes.

Media coverage in the run up to the introduction of the 20 September increase in pension payments highlighted the plight of older people on fixed incomes as a result of the erosion of the real value of concessions.

Even when concessions are indexed they can be set a too low a level. Water prices will double over five years. The water concession is indexed but at 20% of the bill, thus government is requiring pensioners to pay 80% of a doubling of the cost of water.

Transport

COTA Seniors Voice is seeking:

- **Some equity for older people who live outside the metropolitan area for transport concessions that benefit older people in the city. One suggestion is a voucher for any form of transport including petrol costs that can be used by older people who do not have access to public transport**
- **That transport for older people for health care purposes be funded by the Health Portfolio**
- **That HACC funding be provided at an adequate level for its intended purpose in supporting older people to be able to continue to live independently as participating adults in their communities**
- **That the state transport plans be reviewed and upgraded to provide services that meet the journey needs for daily living of older people**

COTA Seniors Voice warmly welcomed the government's decision to provide free off peak travel on public transport in the metropolitan area, as sought in our State Budget submission. However people living outside the metropolitan area were offered no comparable assistance, further exacerbating the inequity of transport concessions.

The announcement also did nothing for the redesign of the transport system so that it meets the needs of the many people who are not travelling daily to school or work. Older people rely on local forms of transport to maintain active participation in the community. Existing forms of community transport are inadequate to support many older people continuing to live independently in their communities.

The current public transport system cannot meet the local travel needs of most people with limited mobility who do not have access to private cars. We urgently need an integrated public and community transport system.

The vast bulk of HACC funding for community transport is used for trips related to health service delivery. The National Aged Care Alliance has eloquently documented the need for transport to be integrated into the delivery of health services [May 2007].

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Health

COTA Seniors Voice is seeking:

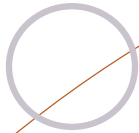
- **Commitment to a fully funded Implementation Plan for the Health Service Framework for Older People over the next term of government**
- **An immediate quadrupling of funding for health promotion and illness prevention programs targeted at older South Australians, with a primary focus on population health measures.**

The Health Service Framework for Older People 2009 – 2016 was finally released in July this year, almost 12 months late. It provides a sound initial basis on which to redesign the health system around the needs, capacities and aspirations of older people - the majority of its users.

The health system consistently discounts older people. They should be but are not a major focus of health promotion and illness prevention. For example programs on falls prevention, promoting healthy behaviours, encouraging strength training and supporting social participation all struggle for a meaningful level and consistency of funding that would enable them to have real impact.

While public debate revolves around one acute hospital what we need is redevelopment of the rest of the system along the lines described in this Framework. One part of that redevelopment, to which COTA Seniors Voice has pointed before, is the redevelopment of the Repatriation General Hospital, our leading hospital for older people.

An audit of the current health system against the Framework's objectives and its service models would find the system seriously wanting. What is now required is a detailed and funded implementation plan for the Framework over the next term of government.



Workforce

COTA Seniors Voice is seeking:

- **Stronger anti-discrimination legislation to support older workers**
- **Employer education and support that targets the small to medium businesses that are the majority of employers but which have less capacity than larger businesses to develop programs to attract and retain older workers**
- **Incentives for employers to attract and/or retain older workers**

The removal of age restrictions on workers compensation eligibility and benefits (with the possible setting of a time cap on benefits after a certain age as a transition step).

The extension of programs supporting workplace and work practice redesign to support increased participation by older people in employment

South Australia has the greatest proportion of people aged over 50 not in the workforce. Increasing the retention rate of older workers in South Australia will more adequately address labour shortages than seeking to compete for workers nationally and internationally.

It will also have a variety of other positive economic and social benefits.

Older people increasingly wish to remain in the workforce even beyond the age at which they may become eligible for pensions or superannuation payments if work with appropriate conditions can be found. The conditions that are appropriate for older workers are no more onerous than those increasingly sought by younger workers to enable them to support family and study needs, as has been recognised by some large businesses, but is yet to be widespread practice.

Housing

COTA Seniors Voice is seeking:

- **The adoption of the Australian Standard for Adaptability in Design**
- **Targeted provision of social housing and housing subsidies for older people, including a 'last home program' to assist low to middle income older people to adapt their existing housing or move to other housing in their areas that better meets their needs and capacities**
- **Better protection for older people living in private rental settings, and active support to enable energy efficiency to be provided in private rental dwellings occupied by older people**

The forthcoming crisis in housing for older people [National Shelter 2009] has been largely ignored by governments. Lack of access to social housing for older people in the past two decades has increased the plight of older private renters considerably, and is now leading to the increase in the numbers of older people who are homeless.

Most older people who own a house cannot afford to adequately maintain it on their fixed incomes, and are unable to sell it to provide housing that may more appropriately meet their needs. It is a rare case in which an older person can trade their home for affordable housing in their own area, yet we know that it is desirable for most older people to age in their own communities.

Continued lack of recognition by state government of the specific needs of older people for housing within policies such as targets for the provision of housing for people on low incomes, and the provision of subsidies for people buying their first home, are prime examples of the ageism in public policy throughout Australia.

It is way past time that the government adopt in to the building code the requirement that housing be designed in a manner that provides accessibility for people with limited mobility; i.e. all of us as we age. As the cost of including universal accessibility at the design stage is negligible compared to retro-fitting housing, the current situation amounts to exclusion of older people and others with limited mobility.