

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Tuesday, 18 June 2019

COTA SA puts government on notice about older people

COTA SA, the peak advocacy body representing 630,000-plus South Australians aged over 50, has raised concerns about the waiting game for tangible, "hit the ground running" programs that will support older people doing it tough right now following the government's State Budget announcement today.

A range of strategy documents in development – a new ageing strategy, a housing and homelessness strategy and the bedding down of health governance reforms – will not in themselves provide a job for older workers, help with transport options for those in regional areas or bring relief for the 10,000 older South Australians currently in housing stress.

COTA SA Chief Executive Jane Mussared says the delay in putting actions in place will particularly impact the lives of disadvantaged older South Australians.

"As a community, we must ask ourselves and the government how much we value our ageing," Ms Mussared said.

"We put the government on notice that we need urgent measures – and funding – to address issues to avoid marginalisation and isolation among older people, especially in regional communities."

While COTA SA acknowledges and welcomes the significant investment in road upgrades in regional areas to increase safety and address the road toll, this is simply not enough on its own.

"Upgrades to road infrastructure needs to be supported by education programs that speak directly to one of the largest road users, the over 50s, together with decent transport alternatives in regional SA. Without them, and with a lack of services in regional communities, older people are being forced behind the wheel, whether or not that's their preference," Ms Mussared said.

"We're yet to hear whether our popular peer education program, Moving Right Along, will extend beyond this year. Importantly, our program has reached 10,000 older South Australians to date, with a further 2,500 this year – for a cost of just \$100,000 a year.

"We welcome the implementation of the Adult Safeguarding Unit, the next stage of the Strathalbyn Aged Care upgrade and the reopening of the Repat, including for people needing support with challenging mental health conditions, in addition to the investment in regional hospitals."

Ms Mussared says the government needs to address the barriers, particularly for older women, to retain employment into their 50s, 60s and beyond.

“Women remain disadvantaged as they are effectively penalised for their disproportionate contributions to child care and other informal care. This budget does not address their inability to get and keep jobs or advance their careers because ageist attitudes and mid-career skills retraining is not available. This often results in a knock-on effect to achieving stable, accessible housing as they age,” she said.

“Research shows nearly 10,000 South Australians aged over 65 are living under housing stress, spending 30 per cent of their income on keeping a roof over their head, with more than a third spending half or more of their income on rent alone.”

Ms Mussared says access to affordable, safe and appropriate housing remains one of the most pressing issues causing financial and psychological stress for older South Australians.

“Older people must not be overlooked when the government develops its housing and homelessness strategies,” she said.

“We were hoping that the second budget of this government may have included some tangible relief for disadvantaged older people which will result in healthier communities, less reliance on hospitals and more universal access to ageing well.

“Despite good infrastructure spend, these things are missing. If you were doing it tough yesterday, you will still be doing it tough today.”

COTA SA is an older people's movement run by, for and with older people. COTA SA represents the aspirations, interests and rights of 633,000 older South Australians. Further information on COTA SA can be found at www.cotasa.org.au.

For all interview requests, please contact:

Bec Tape | rtape@communicate.net.au | 0438 806 983
Ben Smeaton | bsmeaton@communicate.net.au | 0488 940 010