

Will the Budget Enable Seniors to Fare Well?

COTA Victoria is hopeful that the 2009/10 State Budget will see the State Government more specifically address the disadvantage and social exclusion our seniors face in Victoria.

“COTA welcomed the announcement by the Minister of Ageing last year, of the development of a Positive Ageing Framework to guide a whole of government approach to addressing the needs and issues that impact on seniors in this State,” said Sue Hendy, CEO of COTA Victoria. ‘Such a framework is urgently needed, as seniors are missing out in reforms and initiatives that aim to enable people to live well in Victoria. ’

‘There has been little outcome to date on the Ageing in Victoria initiative, and we hope the Budget announced tomorrow will mark a greater responsiveness to ageing issues in this State.’

Growing Victoria Together 2000-2010 is the Government’s vision for making Victoria a stronger more caring and innovative state. It identifies important issues and priority actions for this decade. However ageing is almost entirely absent from the most recent Growing Victoria Together progress report.

‘We have very little data to tell us how well people are ageing in Victoria,’ said Ms Hendy, ‘or how they are faring under current social, economic, and environmental pressures. We know that secure and appropriate housing, age friendly and inclusive communities, and care and support that promotes independence and enables people to maintain control in their lives, all contribute to a healthier and more active ageing experience, but there is little evidence to show that older people are a high priority for the Government.’

‘We also know that ageism undermines the rights, dignity, participation and independence of older people; without commitment to combat ageist attitudes at all levels of the community, ageism is perpetuated and there will be no real change for older people now, and into the future.’

Areas that COTA is looking for Government commitment and action include:

- **Increase funding for energy and water concessions to pensioners**, to retain the real value of concessions. In particular we are seeking the abolition of the cap on the current 50% concession on water bills. If the Government does not lift the cap, price rises could be up to 160% over the next four years for low-income households. With the prices of many essential items rising significantly faster than CPI, concessions have never been more important to ensure pensioners and low-income households can afford the basic necessities of life, including water and energy.
- **Ensure the housing needs of older people are addressed**. The availability of suitable housing is essential if older people are to ‘age well’ and to ‘age in place’. Appropriate and affordable housing is fundamental to both the physical and mental health of seniors, and is a crucial determinant of the effectiveness of the health and care systems. The availability of appropriate rental accommodation for seniors already falls far short of what is required. The situation will worsen dramatically in the next twenty years as the number of older people needing affordable rental housing climbs. Low income, sole person households will have the most significant increase, and about two thirds of these households will be sole women. Notwithstanding the Commonwealth Housing Affordability Scheme and National Rental Tax Incentive, policy provision must be made to address the needs of those older people whose income denies them eligibility for public housing but is insufficient to rent, even in the below-market-rent environment of the not-for profit-sector.

- **Address ageism and uphold the human rights of older people.** The introduction of the Victorian Human Rights Charter has been an important step in ensuring the human rights of all people are upheld in Victoria, yet to date there has been little consideration of the impact of ageism on the health and well-being of older people and the detrimental effect it has throughout the community – by constraining independence, participation and contribution of older people and reducing their inclusion in a socially just society.
- **Development of positive ageing strategies that promote healthy and age friendly environments.** Age friendly communities address issues of environment, service provision and attitudes to older people. Communities that are responsive to older people and their needs create an environment that reduces the impact of ageism and enables older people to age well, which in turn reduces the impact of ill-health, chronic illness and disabilities people may acquire; this results in substantial improvement in their capacity to age in place.

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