

COTA

For older Australians



To The Treasurer

Invest In the Future of Victorian Seniors. COTA Victoria's State Budget Submission 2012-13

COTA Victoria is pleased to present its 2012-13 State Budget Submission.

We are on the cusp of a demographic and societal shift that will impact on our communities for many decades. In 2011, 20% of Victoria's population will be aged 60 or over, and by 2021 more than 25% will be over 60. With the ageing of the baby boomers this trend will continue at a faster rate over the next half century. Already there are areas in Victoria that exceed these average figures, and in some regional areas the over-60 figures are expected to increase to almost half the population by 2021.

COTA welcomes initiatives already undertaken to make a difference to the quality of life and well being of senior Victorians –

- the extension of the Winter Energy Concession to all year round, which has been a significant step in alleviating the cost of living pressures impacting on older people, and
- the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Opportunities for Participation of Older Victorians. We appreciate the Government's recognition of Victoria's ageing population, and its commitment to addressing their needs and concerns, with a positive approach focussed on the on-going participation of our seniors.

Planning for the Future

We urge the State Government to continue to demonstrate its commitment and positive approach by investing in Seniors Victorians, now and for the future, through the development of a 10-year action plan, that will address the quality of life, well-being, care and support of older people by creating an Age-

Friendly Victoria.

An age-friendly society will bring benefits not just to older Victorians, but to all members of our community, through better design and planning in our homes and environment, our work places and opportunities, our training and education, and our health systems. As importantly, it will also lead to changes in attitudes towards older people, and enable our communities to benefit from their participation and contributions.

Acting Now

While we need to plan for the future now, and put in place strategies and policies to ensure that Victorians will be able to experience an active, inclusive and sustainable ageing, our current seniors should not be forgotten. Growth in funding for established programs for older people and funding of new initiatives is critical in the next State Budget.

COTA calls on the State Government to invest in the future of seniors by acting now:

- **Invest in the health of Victorian Seniors**
- **Invest in community supports and amenity for seniors**
- **Invest in alleviating cost of living pressures for seniors**

We look forward to working with the Government to action these recommendations.

Sue Hendy
Chief Executive Officer

Invest in our Seniors Now, for an Active and Positive Future:

Invest in the Health of our Seniors

1. Allocation of Funds to implement recommendations from Parliamentary Inquiry

COTA welcomes the Government's positive approach to ageing, demonstrated through the Parliamentary Inquiry into Opportunities for Participation of Older Victorians. This Inquiry represents the most significant step in the past 10 years, to address the issues and concerns of our ageing population with a pro-active and positive approach. Now is the time for leadership and action. We need a Government that will address the quality of life, well-being, care and support of our seniors by creating an Age-Friendly Victoria.

COTA calls on the State Government to:

- act on the recommendations on the Family and Community Development Committee, with the allocation of dedicated resources;
- prioritise the development of a 10 year strategic action plan for an ageing Victoria;
- develop cross government processes and collaboration to achieve a strategic plan for the creation of an Age Friendly Victoria for our current and future seniors.

2. Increase opportunities for older people to participate in physical activity

Participation in appropriate (ie amounts and types of physical activity) provides the following outcomes:

- Reduced health costs: Reduced risk and/or better management of chronic conditions such as Type 2 Diabetes, cardiovascular disease, arthritis and osteoporosis; reduced falls risk; improved mobility; enhanced mental health and improved confidence, self esteem and independence;

- Increased economic participation by older people, as:
 - paying 'users' of physical activity 'services' – it is estimated that older people contribute \$7.5 mil per year through fees to participate in Living Longer Living Stronger™;
 - participants in the fitness sector workforce. - many older people have undertaken training to enable them to deliver physical activity programs, either as paid employees or volunteers;
 - participants in the workforce in general - improvements in physical and mental health enhance older peoples' capacity to continue in employment or to adopt new career paths.
- Increased capacity for community engagement and participation in civic affairs, as volunteers, etc.

However, data from 2000 indicates that a majority (56%) of people aged 60 – 75 years reported doing 'insufficient' physical activity in the previous week (defined as less than 150 minutes of activity or less than five sessions of activity). 2004-05 ABS data indicated that 31.9% of men and 40.5% of women aged 65-74 years, and 51.5% of men and 58.6% of women aged 75 years and over, were classified as sedentary. Sedentary behaviour had also increased since 2001, especially in men 75 years and over.

Living Longer Living Stronger™ (LLLS) has demonstrated its effectiveness in improving older people's physical and mental health and achieved a high level of brand recognition and credibility with older people and health professionals (including general practitioners). Current Victorian participation is estimated at 17,000. LLLS™ has a track-record in delivering high quality professional development, and older people are now adopting new careers as fitness instructors (paid or voluntary). Funding to COTA to provide support and development of this program ceased in June 2011.

COTA calls on the State Government to:

- support healthy ageing with further funding for the Living Longer Living Stronger™ Program;
- development of a regional based program to facilitate pathways into strength training for older people.

3. Respond to the mental health needs of older people

The focus of reform in the mental health area to date has been on the needs of children and young people. More is now required in responding to the particular needs of older people.

The emergence of mental health issues as people age has only recently begun to be acknowledged. Very often mental health issues have not been identified and treated at earlier stages of life, with serious impacts on older people's health and quality of life. Responsiveness to the needs of older people regardless of their age or stage of life is as important as the on-going treatment of life-long mental health issues.

Mental health problems are not a normal part of ageing. However, older adults maybe more vulnerable to mental health problems, particularly depression and anxiety due to factors such as chronic conditions, loss of status and respect following retirement, lower income, negative community attitudes, loss of spouse, loss of social networks due to decreased mobility, change in residence and/or death (Watson & Hall, 2001).

Older people have a much higher risk of suicide than the general population (WHO, 2001). Moreover, of those who attempt suicide, older people are most likely to complete the attempt (Rodda, Boyce, & Walker, 2008), with males 3-4 times more likely to commit suicide than females (Rodda et al., 2008). The prevalence of psychotic symptoms in older people without dementia is reported to range between 5.5% and 14.1% (Ostling & Skoog, 2002).

Information about the prevalence of mental illness in older people is varied and quite inconsistent. For example, a recent review of 122 papers in this area found that the reported prevalence of depression in older people ranged from 1% to 49% (Djernes, 2006). Similar findings have been found in relation to anxiety.

In particular, a focus on prevention and early intervention for older people is required. Appropriate programs and service responses in the early stages of mental illness need to be developed. In addition, the significant role that HACC and other community support services can play in prevention and early intervention for depression and other mental health issues for older people, should be acknowledged and resourced, as part of a system wide response to the mental health needs of Victorians.

COTA calls on the State Government to:

- develop targeted mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention initiatives for older people;
- ensure there is a greater focus on programs, services and facilities appropriate for older people within and alongside mainstream mental health service settings;
- address barriers obstructing access to aged care, community support, and supported accommodation for older people with mental health issues and illnesses;
- improve care options specific to mental health within mainstream services such as aged care and supported accommodation;
- support research for effective prevention and early intervention strategies for older people.

Invest in key community amenities that support the independence of Seniors

1. Support the creation of Age-Friendly communities through local government initiatives

The collaborative project between COTA and MAV to support and facilitate Positive Ageing strategies in Local Communities achieved many significant outcomes. That 73 of Victoria's 79 Councils have developed Positive Ageing Plans is to be applauded, and it is hoped that local governments will continue their efforts to create communities that are responsive to the needs of older people.

However, many struggle to implement these plans and effect significant and tangible positive change for older people. Resources that have been allocated to small regional municipalities will assist to develop and implement Positive Ageing Strategies. However, leadership and ongoing support is required to see Age-Friendly Communities continue to develop across the state.

COTA calls on the State Government to:

- allocate dedicated funds to resource the capacity of COTA and MAV to continue to work collaboratively on the next phase of the Positive Ageing Project. This would enable the facilitation and implementation of Positive Ageing plans across the State.

2. Maintain important community assets

We look forward to the recommendations of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Opportunities for Participation of Older Victorians, and the tremendous opportunity they will provide to increase in social connectedness, participation and contribution that it will afford older people across Victoria.

Until the recommendations are released and the Government has the chance to respond with positive steps and initiative, COTA urges the Government to maintain those resources, services and programs that enable older people to participate in their communities, and have a good quality of life.

We welcome the Government's reversal of the decision to reduce funding to libraries, as they are a

vital community asset.

Neighbourhood Houses are similarly one of the important community resources that enable many older people to be involved and connected to their communities. Research shows that some 3,800 Victorians volunteer in a Neighbourhood House each week – many of these people are older Victorians who want to contribute to their communities and neighbours. They create a sense of belonging, and provide access to activities and opportunities that would otherwise not exist, particularly in rural and remote areas. They need to be supported with funding that makes them sustainable and viable as a centre for community activity.

Free and equal access to literacy and learning opportunities are essential for the participation and well-being of older people. Importantly for older people these opportunities for education assist with workforce participation, social connections and community wellbeing.

COTA calls on the State Government to:

- ensure the viability of Neighbourhood Houses, especially in rural areas, with a minimum of 20 hours coordination funding;
- ensure the continuation of other important resources and programs that support older people, enable them to be connected to their communities, and active participants.

3. Increase public and community transport

Older people's need for, and use of, public transport, increases with age. Many older people (who may or may not have driven cars in the past) rely solely on public transport to ensure their involvement in social, family and volunteer activities, and to get to medical appointments.

Research on social inclusion has shown that one of the most important factors in maintaining health in the community is to support social inclusion at all levels, and that access to transport is key to ensuring social inclusion.

There are a number of areas that require investment

to ensure older people can maintain their independence and remain connected to their communities:

Accessible Transport: Current initiatives based on the national Disability Standards covering infrastructure, vehicles and premises established under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) (1992) are inadequate. The standards have very attenuated timelines - for example trams need only be 90% compliant by 2017 and community transport vehicles need not be fully compliant until 2032. Although this legislation has resulted in improvements in accessibility, people with disabilities and mobility impairments still face significant barriers to participation in social and economic life, and will do so for the foreseeable future unless an accelerated action plan is adopted.

With the current Action Plan due to expire, allocation of funds is required to adequately meet the DDA targets under the next Accessible Transport Action Plan.

Buses: Bus services are perhaps the most important form of public transport for older Victorians, linking them to places and people in their local communities, and enabling them to access essential services. Investment in buses is needed in all areas, especially with the loss of funding for trialling bus services in regional areas under the Transport Connections Program. While there has been extension of funding for some of these trials, there

needs to be on-going allocation of funds to the successful trials under this program.

Taxis: COTA welcomed the Inquiry into the Taxi Industry and is pleased to see the role of taxis in contributing to the social environment is to be considered alongside economic and environmental issues.

Taxis can and should play a significant role in such a flexible integrated transport system. Our submission to the Inquiry recommended a planning and regulatory framework that enables the Taxi Industry to play its part rather than operating purely as a private enterprise adjunct to the transport system.

COTA calls on the State Government to:

- Set timelines and budget allocations for the improved integration of public transport, together with benchmarks to be achieved relating to accessibility, affordability, frequency, weekend and evening travel
- Allocate funds to implement recommendations from the Taxi Inquiry, particularly, to
 - explore the potential role of taxis in linking people, local destinations and fixed route transport and
 - specifically consider the opportunities and barriers for taxis in this rapidly expanding sector of the market.

Invest in alleviating cost of living pressures

1. Ensure that the cost of utilities, insurance and the availability of concessions are affordable and fair

COTA welcomed the Government's announcement of extension of the Winter Electricity Concession to being a year-round concession. This is assisting low income people who are feeling the burden of rising energy costs. But alone it will not alleviate all the cost of living increases pensioners and other low income seniors will be facing in the future. It will get worse in the next few years with water and energy prices set to rise much faster than inflation, and municipal rates are sky rocketing out of the reach of many older people. As costs increase it is essential that the value

of concessions do not erode over time, especially as climate change impacts and responses, such as the implementation of smart meters increases the total cost of utilities to households.

We know that low income seniors are doing it hard under cost of living pressures. They are more likely to go without food and medications to ensure that their bills are paid, putting their health and well-being at risk.

And now, some older people who are in difficult financial circumstances, who would previously received assistance under the Home Wise or Water Wise programs, are facing further hardship. Unable to afford the costs of new or replacement appliances,

and unable to sustain the repayments under the No Interest Loan Scheme (NILS) they are either going without essential appliances, or continue to use faulty or inefficient appliances that contribute to excessive bills.

COTA urges the State Government to:

- increase concessions for power, gas, water and rates;
- introduce fair pricing methods;
- better promote the carted water rebate to ensure all low income households without reticulated water are able to access relevant concessions and rebates;
- develop a new program that addresses the gap created through the abolition of the Home Wise program.

2. Increase the stock of appropriate social housing for older people.

Older people who do not own their own homes are struggling to find decent places to live. Private rental is too expensive and in short supply. Some public housing is unsuitable and older people can be on waiting for years and even decades. For the first time in their lives, many older people, particularly women, are facing homelessness.

Furthermore, the lack of appropriate housing and the high costs involved in adapting existing housing are significant contributors to loss of independence, social isolation, and reliance on community and aged care services among older Australians. The need to address these issues is becoming more urgent as we face a significant increase in our aged population. The previous government failed to introduce Universal Housing Design Regulations as promised. The work is done to make this a reality, and this initiative will have significant beneficial impacts for older people, people with disabilities, and their families and broader communities.

Housing issues and concerns for older people comprise one of the highest reasons for calling Seniors Information Victoria (SIV). Difficulties in security of tenure and finding affordable and appropriate housing are issues most commonly raised.

Victoria needs a significant increase in the number of affordable and appropriate housing options available to older people.

COTA calls on the State Government to:

- establish an Older Person's Housing Unit in the Office of Housing;
- develop and implement an integrated strategic policy framework for older people's housing with a focus on low-income tenants;
- increase the social housing stock that is appropriate and accessible by older people;
- introduce Universal Housing Design Regulations as a priority.

3. Addressing the impact of Climate Change on older people

The impacts of extreme weather conditions, and other environmental issues, are being felt across Victoria, and will have significant impacts on vulnerable households and individuals, including older people.

There is a need for policies to be focused, coordinated, and specific to the range of impacts a changing climate will have on the lives of an ageing population. Leadership is required to address the challenge of growing older in a changing climate and to ensure a safe, secure, equitable and sustainable future for older people. An Older People and Climate Change Task Force should be established that brings together older people's organisations, key stakeholders, the voluntary sector, government agencies and academia. The initial purpose of the group should be to develop a whole of government policy framework that sets out cross-sectoral interventions and policies to improve the quality of life of older people. This collaborative effort would coordinate and focus action to deal with the range of issues and impacts a changing climate will have on the lives of an ageing population.

COTA's Green Sages project, which has been supported by the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability, takes as its starting point the belief that older people can be seen as potential contributors and casualties of climate change as well as campaigners to tackle the problem. COTA has engaged with older Victorians to find out what they know about climate change and what their capacity is for reducing and coping with its effects. We have formed partnerships and links with a number of government and non government organizations, community groups and individuals to ensure that

older Victorians have a chance to have their say on climate change and the impact they see it will bring to their lives.

Addressing the standards of housing will also contribute significantly to protecting the vulnerable and disadvantaged. Better thermal efficiency of homes will reduce the extent of heating and cooling required, and therefore the costs for households. It will also protect vulnerable people from extreme temperatures. But to ensure the most disadvantaged groups will be protected, significant upgrading of the water and energy efficiency of existing homes will be essential.

COTA urges the State government to:

- address the energy efficiency of older people's homes by:
 - introducing a major program of investment so that every dwelling is retrofitted to the highest possible standard of energy efficiency;
 - introducing minimum rental standards as older people in rental accommodation are particularly vulnerable;
 - upgrading Government owned social housing to these same standards;
 - ensuring regulatory frameworks are complemented by accessible incentive programs targeted to provide access to energy and water efficiency for vulnerable groups;
 - developing a 'one stop shop' access point that would assist vulnerable households to access energy efficiency programs and rebates. These programs should be well coordinated between federal, state and local governments;
 - investing in community health and support organisations to work at the grass roots level and identify older people and dwellings that could benefit from energy efficiency programs;
 - funding COTA's Green Sages initiative to support older people to take leadership in building capacity of communities to respond to, and ameliorate, the impacts of extreme weather and environmental impacts.

COTA Victoria

COTA Victoria's mission is to enable older people to age well in a just society. It is committed to human rights, social justice and the eradication of ageism.

COTA Victoria is a non-profit organization, of individual older people and organizations representing older people, committed to improving the well-being of all older Victorians. As the peak body representing older people in Victoria, COTA engages with over 60,000 senior Victorians annually. As a result of our work with older people, and on the issues that impact on them and their quality of life, we are able to track emerging or continuing issues facing older Victorians and to inform the policy processes of COTA.

COTA Victoria's role:

- Provide information, education and services to older people, their relatives and the wider community
- Provide policy advice on behalf of older people to state and local governments, service providers and the general community
- Undertake research and policy development on issues affecting older people
- Promote and publicizes the needs and preferences of older people to the general community
- Encourage a high level of involvement of older people in the organisation and its activities.