

Bidding for older Victorians

November 2019

The Andrews Labor Government commitment to a fairer Victoria is welcomed by older Victorians, who share a desire to live in a State where we can all thrive.

Yet, in this rich and vibrant state, systemic age discrimination that enables the expression of ageism in every day interactions, remains a key barrier to both social and economic participation of many older Victorians.

Older Victorians are a diverse and dynamic group and growing in number. That's why targeted investment in infrastructure and services that enable older Victorians of all walks of life to age well is crucial to progressing the government's agenda.

Such investment will provide a positive return on investment, particularly with reduced health care costs and positive social and economic impacts.

As the Victorian Government develops its next budget, we call for investment in six key areas:

1 Liveable communities that foster social participation of older people

2 Supporting mature aged workers to be sought after and valued employees

3 A transport system that gets all older Victorians where they need to go

4 Information services that meet the needs of all older Victorians

5 Supporting Victorians to plan for a future of healthy ageing

6 Strengthening our family violence response for older people

COTA Victoria - the voice of older Victorians

COTA Victoria is the leading not-for-profit organisation representing the interests and rights of people aged 50+ in Victoria. For nearly 70 years, we have led government, corporate and community thinking about the positive aspects of ageing.

Today, our focus is on promoting opportunities for, and protecting the rights of, older Victorians.



Leadership for Change

The case for a whole of government commitment to healthy ageing

The Victorian Government holds considerable responsibility for the planning, delivery and regulation of a range of infrastructure and services that seek to meet the current and projected demands of our State's rapidly transforming population.

One of the most critical demographic changes is that more Victorians are growing older than ever before. As of the 30 June this year, 30.6% of Victorians enrolled to vote were aged 60 and over – that is in excess of 1.2 million voters.

Overall, more than 20% of the Victorian population is aged over 60 and that number is increasing rapidly. By 2031, Victorians aged over 60 living in Greater Melbourne will comprise 22% of the population, and almost a third (31%) of Victorians living in rural and regional areas will be aged over 60.

Ageing affects all Victorians – young and old – through our own life journey, through our relationships with older people and through the social and economic impacts of older people's participation. Every Victorian is touched by the experience of ageing.

Despite this, ageism prevails in many facets of our lives. Alarming 35% of Australians aged 55-64 years and 43% of Australians aged over 65 years report having experienced age discrimination.

Ageing is an individual journey. We cannot assume that we will all experience life in the same way, contribute in the same way, or require the same type and level of amenity and support. One size does not fit all.

Healthy ageing is defined by the World Health Organisation as being affected by our intrinsic capacity and environmental factors; our social, political, economic and built environment.

Australia is a World Health Organisation

Member State and partner of the Decade for Healthy Ageing, commencing in 2020. Globally, there has never been a stronger commitment to addressing the environmental factors that impact upon an ageing society.

The Andrews Labor Government commitment to a fairer Victoria needs to ensure that older Victorians, especially those experiencing hardship and disadvantage, will not be forgotten. Instead, older Victorians need to be at the forefront of government thinking and investment; provided with every opportunity to thrive.

“Ageing is everyone’s business.”

*Gerard Mansour,
Commissioner for Senior Victorians*

1 Liveable Communities

Fostering participation and connection

A focus on social participation is an essential ingredient of building liveable and resilient communities. Victorians must be encouraged and supported to maintain and develop our connections to family, friends and recreational activities and groups as we age.

The experience of isolation and loneliness is of great concern for the health and wellbeing of Victorians in the 21st century, with one in four Australians reporting being lonely, according to a recent survey conducted by the Australian Psychological Society and Swinburne University of Technology.

The survey confirmed that people feeling lonely often experience poorer quality of life and lower feelings of wellbeing, as well as discomfort in social situations and poorer social connections.

Overall, older Victorians experience isolation and loneliness at similar rates to younger

Victorians. However, the risk of becoming socially isolated may be increased by some common experiences of later life, and among particular groups of older people.

One of the key enablers of maintaining our social connections as we age is to be able to travel to meet with family and friends, and participate in recreational activities of one's choosing. That's why COTA Victoria urges the Victorian Government to address transport access issues (see page 5) for older Victorians and implement our transport recommendations.

There are many existing organisations and groups that offer an important social touch point for older Victorians. Some of these groups are facing challenges to their operation, struggling to remain viable with declining membership, or failing to secure suitable facilities to accommodate growing or changing demands.

In 2020-21 COTA Victoria calls upon the Victorian Government to:

» Build community understanding and respect through investment in sustainable initiatives that seek to build positive relationships between generations.

» Provide on-going investment in local communities to foster inclusion of older people and undertake evaluation to develop a knowledge base of what works, depending on different environmental conditions.

» Review current capital works programs that target seniors' groups to ensure equitable investment in the infrastructure needs of all relevant organisations.

» Invest in clubs and groups to continue to provide an essential service for older CALD Victorians, through dedicated support with planning and meeting their financial and legal accountabilities.

» Address the lack of availability of appropriate physical activity programs in rural townships through funding to develop workforce capacity to deliver physical activity programs that meet the needs of older people.

2 Skills and Jobs

Helping Victorians to reinvent themselves

For many older Victorians, the experience of work can cause great stress, often resulting from the difficulty in remaining competitive in the workforce. This can be attributed to a range of factors including a rapidly changing job market and workplace cultures that are often ageist. Our education and training sector is also mostly geared to the learning needs and styles of younger people.

The impacts of precarious employment and unemployment upon Victorians of all ages are well known to increase vulnerability for both individuals and their families. As we age, this vulnerability can be heightened given the decreasing amount of time we have to earn an income and secure our financial future for retirement.

In order to equip middle aged and older Victorians with the skills they need to be active and valued participants in the workforce, a cultural shift is required. Programs that encourage and support all Victorians to adapt to changing labour market opportunities – to be capable of “reinvention” – are paramount to achieving equity in workforce participation between older and younger workers.

The community services industry is Victoria’s fastest growing industry, with exponential employment growth predicted to meet the demands of our growing and ageing population. Major social reforms have also created workforce opportunities. This could offer great potential careers for a number of mature aged Victorians.

In 2020-21 COTA Victoria calls upon the Victorian Government to:

» Act as an employer champion to Victorian industry. Through implementing a best practice approach to recruitment and retention of mature aged workers, the government can lead the creation of workplace environments that enable participation by all Victorian workers.

» Revise free TAFE eligibility to ensure that mature aged job seekers and workers who are experiencing employment vulnerability are provided with an opportunity to retrain and access new career pathways.

» Invest in development of a program that attracts mature aged workers to the community services industry and enables them to take advantage of growth in employment opportunities.

» Review funding arrangements with essential community service providers that will ensure industry viability and enable growth and retention of a skilled and experienced workforce delivering quality, person centered services.

» Invest in local, wrap-around, individualised supports to mature aged workers and job seekers to develop skills and confidence in undertaking training, prior to engaging with TAFE or other tertiary education.

3 Transport

Enabling Victorians of all generations to live, work and play

The Andrews Labor Government is investing significantly in large scale infrastructure projects to bring our straining transport system up to date with the demands of modern day Victoria.

COTA Victoria shares the government's view that a well-integrated and sustainable transport network improves the quality of life for Victorians. Our transport system is essential to enabling Victorians to live, work and play.

It is vital that all infrastructure projects consider the travel amenity needs of older Victorians (that often share similar needs to younger Victorians with disabilities) and that service gaps in transport are addressed as a matter of priority.

Walking is the most accessible physical activity available to most Victorians, regardless of socio economic status and age. Yet, pedestrian safety is of great concern to older Victorians

who are over represented in pedestrian fatalities.

A more walkable environment can also help foster a sense of social connection and community within cities and neighbourhoods.

In Victoria, there has been a long standing gap in the provision of supported, community based transport. This type of transport is used by people who cannot access public or private transport.

There is a known unmet demand for this transport by people who do not qualify for, or cannot access adequate transport support through Commonwealth funded aged and disability service systems. This situation is worst in rural, regional and interface areas that are poorly serviced by public transport. The many older Victorians who, as a result, cannot access necessary services and maintain social connections, are amongst the most vulnerable in our State.

In 2020-21 COTA Victoria calls upon the Victorian Government to:

» Invest in a feasibility study to determine the demand and most suitable model for a community based, supported transport program to service transport disadvantaged Victorians.

» Ensure that all new development and planned refurbishment of public transport infrastructure includes provision of amenities and facilities that will encourage use by older Victorians.

» Increase the ongoing investment in driver awareness programs targeting older drivers to increase their confidence through safer driving practices. Priority should be given to expanding programs to outer urban and regional localities, where drivers typically travel longer distances and have less access to public transport.

» Prevent injuries and deaths and increase older Victorians' uptake of active transport through investing in infrastructure to enhance walkability in local neighbourhoods and safer pedestrian routes surrounding transport hubs and activity centres.

4 Promoting Fairness

Tackling the digital divide

Our digital age has rapidly changed the way in which we communicate with one another and access information, services and infrastructure. For many Victorians, the online world has enhanced the experience of ageing by enabling information to be accessed at one's fingertips.

The reality is that older Victorians are most likely to be excluded by the ever increasing provision of digital information and services. Victorians experiencing English literacy, digital

literacy and internet access barriers have a significantly diminished capacity to access timely information and supports and navigate complex systems.

Every Victorian deserves to be treated fairly and experience equity in accessing information and the services and infrastructure they need to live well. That's why the Andrews Labor Government needs to address this digital divide.

In 2020-21 COTA Victoria calls upon the Victorian Government to:

» Invest in a telephone service accessible during ordinary business hours to compliment the Seniors Online Victoria website and provide over the phone triage support and information to older Victorians who cannot access digital systems.

» Resource a centrally located drop-in information centre for Victorian seniors to support and build their capacity to access what they need, when they need it.

» Fund targeted information outreach that meets the communication needs of diverse communities.

5 Planning for Change

Prepared for the future

Victorians not only require information to make decisions and plan for our futures. We also need to be encouraged to do so. This can be achieved by developing workplaces and community spaces as safe places to consider ageing and how we might best navigate

through the challenges that are ahead of us. Strong investment in prevention through a life course planning approach is crucial to tackling ageism and enabling Victorians to be confident in planning for our futures.

In 2020-21 COTA Victoria calls upon the Victorian Government to:

» Invest in the design of a future life planning campaign targeting Victorian workplaces. This would include the development of a program of policies, practice guidelines and resources to develop workplace cultures that positively support middle aged and older workers to plan for their futures.

6 A Safe Victoria

Towards ending elder abuse

The Andrews Labor Government has done significant work to recognise elder abuse as a form of family violence.

Research suggests that up to 14 per cent of older people may experience it in the form of physical, emotional, financial, social or sexual abuse. Elder abuse can cause stress, anxiety and depression and lead to increased risk of ill health, hospitalisation and early death.

Elder abuse that results in homelessness and poverty can make it more difficult for older people to cope with illness, disability and ageing.

There is an ongoing challenge for family violence services to provide an appropriate, person centred response to victims and perpetrators of elder abuse.

In 2020-21 COTA Victoria calls upon the Victorian Government to:

» Resource research of perpetrator behaviour to inform the development of behaviour change and other support mechanisms targeting perpetrators of elder abuse.

» Invest in a workforce development training package for Community Legal Centres to build the sector's capacity to provide specialist advice and representation to victims of elder abuse.

» Increase support to victims of elder abuse to access support, move out of crisis, and improve their safety, well-being and independence through receipt of case managed, wrap around supports.

» Fund a specialist, multidisciplinary secondary consultation service for Orange Doors and family violence services working with elder abuse victims and perpetrators.



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