

Bidding for older Victorians

COTA Victoria's report card on the 2020-21 state budget

In our 2020-21 pre-budget submission, we asked the Victorian Government to increase investment in a range of services and infrastructure to help Victorians age well.

Our key asks were framed around the following six priority areas:

1 Liveable communities that foster social participation of older people

4 Strengthening our family violence response for older people

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

5 Information services that meet the needs of all older Victorians

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

6 Supporting Victorians to plan for a future of healthy ageing

The 2020-21 state budget was handed down by Treasurer, Tim Pallas on 24 November. We have produced this report card to outline:

- » What we asked for in our original pre-budget submission.
- » Which items of interest have been prioritised in the 2020-21 budget.
- » What action is still needed to support older Victorians in the 2021-22 budget.

It must be noted that our pre-budget submission was completed before the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has undoubtedly had a devastating impact on many older Victorians and will continue to shape some of our policy priorities and recommendations moving forward.

1 Liveable communities that foster social participation of older people

We asked the Victorian Government to:

- » Build community understanding and respect through investment in sustainable initiatives that seek to build positive relationships between generations.
- » Address the lack of availability of appropriate physical activity programs in rural townships, through funding to develop workforce capacity and deliver physical activity programs that meet the needs of older people.
- » 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.
- » Invest in clubs and groups to continue that provide an essential service for older CALD Victorians, through dedicated support with planning and meeting their financial and legal accountabilities.
- » Review current capital works programs that target seniors' groups to ensure equitable investment in supporting the infrastructure needs of all relevant organisations.

In the 2020-21 budget, the Victorian Government has committed to:

- » Providing additional funding to extend the *Community Activation and Social Isolation initiative* for a further 6 months until June 2021. This initiative will continue to support older Victorians who are experiencing social disconnection as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- » Providing financial support to multicultural seniors' groups through the *Coronavirus Support for Multicultural Seniors grants program*. This funding will enable multicultural seniors' groups to continue to support their members and build stronger connections with their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- » Providing funding to support seniors sports initiatives through *Seniors Community Sport Infrastructure Grants*. We are yet to determine the detail of this budget measure, but we hope it will deliver on our request for increased investment in physical activity programs that meet the needs of older people
- » Providing funding to improve the availability, usability and accessibility of critical infrastructure in local communities through the *Growing Suburbs Fund*.

We are now calling on the Victorian Government to implement the following recommendations in the 2021-22 budget:

» Provide funding to support the administration of a diverse range of community-based programs that address social isolation and loneliness across the ageing population. This should include the availability of targeted funding to support groups for at risk populations including older men and single older people.

» In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, fund the provision of training to community organisations to help them ensure online meetings and activities are inclusive of the needs of older people with functional limitations such as cognitive, vision or hearing impairment.

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

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

In the 2020-21 budget, the Victorian Government has committed to:

- » Providing additional funding for Jobs Victoria to deliver advice and support to those who need extra help. We remain hopeful that this additional funding will help ensure frontline staff working within Jobs Victoria are properly equipped to respond to the specific needs of mature-aged jobseekers and will fulfill the need for individualised wrap-around supports.
- » Investing in wage subsidies to encourage businesses to employ women over 45 years of age. While we welcome this funding, we are concerned that there are no specific measures to address the many challenges that older men face in obtaining and retaining work. We also advocate the need for this measure to be accompanied by a robust communication strategy, as there will be a number of barriers to businesses capitalising on this incentive.
- » Providing funding to give additional flexibility for Victorians particularly affected by economic disruption to access subsidised and Free TAFE training to reskill and upskill in 2021. We are hopeful that this measure will increase access to TAFE services for some mature-aged jobseekers who have lost work during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are now calling on the Victorian Government to implement the following recommendations in the 2021-22 budget:

- » Implement the recommendations from the *Inquiry into Sustainable Employment for Disadvantaged Jobseekers*, particularly those which relate to mature-aged workers.

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

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

In the 2020-21 budget, the Victorian Government has committed to:

- » Funding the purchase of 100 Next Generation low-floor trams. This will facilitate the phasing out of the high-floor tram fleet and ensure tram services are accessible to as many passengers as possible.
- » Funding the removal of an additional 25 level crossings across the state which will make our communities safer for older pedestrians.
- » Providing funding for new bike and pedestrian paths across Melbourne, including safety upgrades and dedicated bike lanes on St Kilda Road.

We are now calling on the Victorian Government to implement the following recommendations in the 2021-22 budget:

» 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.

» Provide additional investment in infrastructure to enhance walkability in local neighbourhoods and safer pedestrian routes surrounding transport hubs and activity centres

» Increase the ongoing investment in driver awareness programs targeting older drivers to increase their confidence through safer driving practices.

4 Strengthening our family violence response for older people

We asked the Victorian Government to:

- » Fund research into perpetrator behaviour to inform the development of behaviour change and other support mechanisms targeting perpetrators 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.
- » 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.
- » Fund a specialist, multidisciplinary secondary consultation service for Orange Doors and family violence services working with elder abuse victims and perpetrators.

In the 2020-21 budget, the Victorian Government has committed to:

- » Providing \$321,500 in funding over the next two years to help Seniors Rights Victoria provide services to older Victorians experiencing elder abuse, including those who are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This funding was committed in June but falls within the parameters of the 2020-21 budget.
- » Providing \$1.9 million to support several important initiatives to prevent and respond to elder abuse, including the continuation of the Implementation Monitor's oversight of the state's family violence reforms and extension of a program to embed elder abuse identification and response in the public health system.

We are now calling on the Victorian Government to implement the following recommendations in the 2021-22 budget:

» Ensure elder abuse remains an integral part of the family violence response and is not only addressed through the health system but also by other initiatives including the continuation and expansion of community level elder abuse prevention.

» Invest in building the evidence base around perpetrators of elder abuse to inform the development of behaviour change and other support mechanisms for those at risk of using violence against older family members.

» 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.

» Invest in a community awareness campaign about the risks and safeguarding measures for providing intergenerational financial support to family members (particularly in response to the COVID-19 recession). Additionally, fund the provision of financial counselling for older Victorians who are considering providing financial support to younger family members.

» 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.

5 Information services that meet the needs of all older Victorians

We asked 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 outreach that meets the communication needs of diverse communities.

In the 2020-21 budget, the Victorian Government has committed to:

- » Creating a new agency called 'Digital Victoria' to improve the digital delivery of government services. This measure has been announced in response to the increased reliance on digital technology resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- » Increasing investment in improving state cyber security and protection systems.
- » While these measures are timely, the government needs to ensure all services, systems and processes remain accessible to those who are not digitally connected. Without this assurance, these people risk becoming increasingly marginalised and will experience increased difficulty in accessing benefits to which they are eligible.

We are now calling on the Victorian Government to implement the following recommendations in the 2021-22 budget:

- » 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.

- » Ensure all Departments responsible for administering relief packages and associated programs are adequately resourced to make their services accessible to people who do not use the internet.

- » Invest in a public awareness campaign aimed at assisting and encouraging older Victorians to get online. This campaign would cut across all media channels and would include:
 - ▶ Positive messaging featuring a diverse range of older people who have been successfully supported to get online, including older people with disability and older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
 - ▶ Information about the safety and benefits of being online during the pandemic and beyond.
 - ▶ Information about assistive technology solutions that are available to facilitate and enhance access for older people, including older people with disability.

- » Increase investment in initiatives to support older people to get online, including:
 - ▶ The introduction of an internet supplement for older Victorians on low and modest incomes (in recognition of the costs of connection to the NBN).
 - ▶ Assistance to obtain a device and resolve issues around internet connectivity.
 - ▶ One-on-one support with setup, installation and training.
- ▶ Increased funding for specialised software or hardware to help facilitate and enhance access for older people.
- ▶ Funding for training in the use of specialised software or hardware to facilitate and enhance access for older people.
- ▶ Ongoing and individualised phone-based tech support

6 Supporting Victorians to plan for a future of healthy ageing

We asked 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. Once developed, this program would require further funding to be delivered over subsequent years.

In the 2020-21 budget, the Victorian Government has committed to:

There were no measures in the budget that addressed our request.

We are now calling on the Victorian Government to implement the following recommendations in the 2021-22 budget:

- » 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. Once developed, this program would require further funding to be delivered over subsequent years.

Other items of interest

We also welcome the following initiatives which will undoubtedly have a positive impact on the lives of many older Victorians:

» A commitment to build 12,000 new social and affordable homes over the next four years.

» Energy efficiency upgrades for 250,000 low income households and more than 35,000 social housing properties.

» The provision of a one-off \$250 Power Saving Bonus for Victorian households that have at least one Jobseeker, youth allowance recipient or pensioner.

» Additional funding to continue the implementation of Victoria's Voluntary Assisted Dying laws, including funding for the *Voluntary Assisted Dying care navigator system*.



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