



Make Victoria Age Friendly:

What older Victorians need
from an incoming Government



Introduction

Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victoria is the peak body representing the rights, needs and interests of Victorians over the age of 50.

Older people currently make up more than 20% of Victorian voters and this number is growing. With this in mind, COTA Victoria calls on all parties and independents to commit to the following six asks in the lead up to the 2022 state election. These asks will go a long way towards enabling people to maintain their health, mobility, independence, and enjoyment of life as they age. These measures would also offer a significant return on investment by:

- Maximising opportunities for older people to contribute to the community and economy.
- Reducing expenditure in other areas such as health and community care.
- Delaying or preventing people from moving into residential care.

1. Provide access to safe, affordable housing and strengthen residents' rights

THE ISSUE:

There has been a steep increase in the number of older people experiencing homelessness over the past few years, with older women disproportionately impacted. Home ownership is falling among older Victorians and only 1.7% of rental housing is affordable to a single person on the Aged Pension. Despite increasing demand, waiting lists for public and community housing have continued to grow while housing stock has decreased.

Retirement villages provide a safe, secure housing option for many older Victorians but public confidence in the system is low. The current government undertook to update the Retirement Villages Act to ensure effective consumer protections and growth and innovation in the sector. This promise remains unfulfilled.

THE ASK:

Improve access to age-friendly housing by:

- Building at least 60,000 new public and community homes by 2032 and maintaining the prioritisation of people over 55 on the Public Housing Register.
- Ensuring public and community housing is built in areas that support people to maintain social and cultural networks, feel safe, and retain access to transport, health, and other services.
- Updating the Retirement Villages Act to reduce the complexity of contracts and strengthen the rights of residents. The updated Act must secure a resident's right to age in place, receive services of choice and have access to a Housing Ombudsman.

2. Bridge the divide for older Victorians who are digitally excluded

THE ISSUE:

Older people are the most digitally excluded age group in Australia. The equity gap for these people has increased significantly over the past few years as more information and services have moved online. There will continue to be a cohort of older Victorians who do not have the capacity to confidently access information and services online. It is critical that there are low-tech, age-friendly communication channels available to meet their needs.

THE ASK:

Improve access to information and services for older people who are digitally excluded by:

- Requiring all Government Departments and statutory authorities to outline how they will provide equitable access to information and services to people who are digitally excluded.
- Providing dedicated funding for COTA Victoria's Information Line, which offers phone-based assistance to support people who are digitally excluded.

3. Help older Victorians get where they need to go

THE ISSUE:

Access to transport is recognised as a key factor influencing active ageing. Older people who do not drive risk being unable to shop, attend medical appointments or participate in community activities if appropriate and affordable alternatives are not provided. While community transport provides a safe, door-to-door option for many older people who have difficulty using other modes of transportation:

- Victoria's community transport system is underfunded and unable to keep up with consumer demand
- There is an inconsistent approach to service availability, eligibility, and cost across the state
- People living in residential care are unable to access community transport. This prevents them from connecting with people and activities in the community.

THE ASK:

Fund a thoroughly costed, state-wide Community Transport program to support older Victorians experiencing transport disadvantage.

4. Improve access to assistive technology to support healthy and active ageing

THE ISSUE:

The timely provision of assistive technology is critical to enabling people to remain safe, mobile, active and independent as they age. Grab rails, ramps, chair lifts, hoists, prosthetic aids, wheelchairs and electric scooters are all examples of assistive technology. While these products can be fully funded under the National Disability Insurance Scheme, many older people are ineligible for this scheme and cannot access the support they need elsewhere. The Victorian State-wide Equipment Program (SWEP) is underfunded and unable to meet current levels of demand. The subsidy amount provided only covers a small fraction of market costs, leaving the recipient with a significant out of pocket expense. Many recipients are also forced to wait more than 12 months to receive the support they need.

THE ASK:

Improve access to assistive technology for older Victorians with disability who are excluded from the NDIS by:

- Increasing funding for the Victorian State-wide Equipment Program (SWEP) to provide a higher subsidy for consumers and reduce wait times.
- Reviewing the eligibility criteria for SWEP to reduce access barriers for older people with disability whose needs are not being met through other service systems.
- Proactively championing the need for a nationally consistent assistive technology program to support people with disability who are not eligible for the NDIS at future Disability Reform Ministers' meetings.

5. Support people who have experienced or are at risk of elder abuse

THE ISSUE:

Around 15% of older people experienced elder abuse in the past 12 months. Although elder abuse is a form of family violence, it can be different to intimate partner violence as it is often perpetrated by adult children and requires a specialist approach. Elder abuse services continue to be severely underfunded in comparison with other family violence services, despite increasing demand. Seniors Rights Victoria (SRV) provides a state-wide focal point for elder abuse prevention and response and is a leader in the elder abuse sector. Between February and July this year, SRV received 500 more calls than were received during the same period in 2020, and 370 more calls than were received during the same period in 2021. The complexity of cases has also increased. Additional funding would enable SRV to:

- Broaden the reach of elder abuse prevention programs, particularly into regional areas and CALD communities.
- Ensure the ongoing availability of specialist workers who are best placed to respond to cases of elder abuse in the community.
- Reduce wait times for support.

THE ASK:

Provide increased, sustainable core funding for Seniors Rights Victoria (SRV) as the only state-wide integrated legal and advocacy service specialising in elder abuse.

6. Improve the oral health of older Victorians

THE ISSUE:

Many older Victorians experience pain and discomfort, the onset of secondary health conditions and poor nutrition because they do not have timely access to affordable dental care. While some older people can access free or low-cost care through public dental services, they can currently wait more than 2 years to access this support. Older Victorians living in residential aged care or Supported Residential Services have little or no access to dental care unless it is arranged and paid for by their family.

THE ASK:

Improve the oral health of older Victorians by:

- Increasing funding for public dental services to ensure older Victorians have timely access to free and low-cost dental care.
- Funding a free or low-cost mobile dental service to provide oral health care to Victorians living in residential aged care, those living in Supported Residential Services and those living in rural and regional areas.





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Acknowledgement to country

COTA Victoria acknowledges the traditional custodians of land throughout Victoria and their continuing connection to land, water and community. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging.