



# Frances Bedford

**Independent for Newland**

*Community Counts!!*

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Dear Jane

Thank you for your detailed document and the opportunity to respond to the issues raised in the COTA SA 2022 Election Platform.

At the outset, I would like to acknowledge the important work COTA carries out representing South Australia's older people and my belief the entire Aged Care sector needs urgent attention.

I share a deep concern for the digital divide of our state and support any initiatives which aim to include older South Australians in the digital world and most importantly access to housing and health services. Please see attached document for a more detailed response to your priorities.

I look forward to working with you in the future.

Yours sincerely

**FRANCES BEDFORD**  
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23 February 2022



## **Response to COTA 2022 Election Platform**

**By Frances Bedford, Independent Candidate for Newland**

### **Ageing in Country SA**

In 2018, State-wide Conversations with Older South Australians took place engaging more than 1,500 older people. These conversations found older persons want to have better options for staying in their homes and community, making and maintaining social relationships and navigating change as they age.<sup>1</sup> South Australia has an ageing population with more than 630,500 people over the age of 50, with 95% living independently at home. According to your document, a significant amount (26%) of those aged over 50 live in country SA.

Your strategies for Ageing in Country South Australia and Country Engagement Program look at improving housing shortages, employment opportunities, transport between communities, digital inclusion, environmental conservation, future models of health and aged care services and community connections, for those ageing in the country. It is critical our older generation are supported and provided with the services they need to age comfortably and in their own home.

The pandemic has been a tremendous strain on all sectors and industries. Staff shortages have increased pressure on those available (not sick or isolating) and our workforce has become drained. Plans mapping out set targets for future optimal health and aged care staffing levels must provide guidance for better management of staff and ensure our health sector is capable to deal with SA's ageing population.

### **Digital Inclusion**

Access to the digital world has been encouraged and increased substantially with the onset of COVID-19. Video chats have been used to stay connected with family and friends or conduct work meetings and schooling from home. COVID advice is provided through the website, QR code check-ins are easily accessible through a mobile phone and registration for free Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) kit is online. Without access to a computer, digital smart device or the internet, many older South Australians are left out of the digital world and cannot access important information.

The digital inclusion gap continues to grow – the Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) deems SA the least digitally inclusive state in Australia scoring 69 (an ADII score range: included).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> SA Health, 2022, "South Australia's Plan for Ageing Well 2020-2015", Government of South Australia, accessed at:

<sup>2</sup> Australian Digital Inclusion Index, 2021, "Digital Inclusion: The Australian Context in 2021", ADII, available at: <https://www.digitalinclusionindex.org.au/what-is-digital-inclusion/>, [accessed on: 09/02/2022].

Many reasons affect digital inclusion in SA including:

- The disappearance of non-online services
- Black spots and mobile coverage
- Do not have a smartphone, smart device, or computer
- Do not know how to adequately use a smartphone, smart device, or computer.

Not only does the digital divide impact on an older person's daily life, it further isolates them from their community and creates barriers to maintaining social connections. It is imperative non-online services remain accessible, black spots and mobile coverage are improved, and our older generations are encouraged and taught to use the digital world - we must not leave our ageing population behind.

### **Pervasive Age Discrimination and Employment**

Ageism is becoming more prominent in South Australia and negatively impacting upon older people. Tackling ageism is one of the core aims of South Australia's Plan for Ageing Well 2020-2025. An initiative – Tackling Ageism Award – was first presented in December 2020. I would like to acknowledge and congratulate COTA SA for being one of the two finalists for this award.

Ageism is most experienced in employment for women over the age of 50 and as mentioned in your document, 15.3% of older Australians are under-employed. Under-employment and un-employment adversely affect individuals and increases financial insecurities, poverty and homelessness. While volunteering is important, it does not pay bills.

Initiatives and awareness campaigns addressing ageism are supported to encourage better and more inclusive societal values - especially as age discrimination further isolates and marginalises older South Australians.

### **Housing**

As you mention in your document, "*housing is essential to ageing well*". Social and affordable housing is a vital aspect to supporting individuals on low incomes, particularly older women facing unemployment or retirement on little or no super. This will be a priority for me. The ongoing effects of COVID-19 have only exacerbated, and accentuated homelessness and the financial supports introduced only provided temporary relief – even for those who opted to withdraw funds from their superannuation – bringing other consequences.

More and more individuals and families seek the protection affordable housing can offer and almost always require support to achieve it. Housing has to be made a top priority for all levels of government and will be something I continue to champion and support now and into the future.

### **Greater Access to Health Services and Programs**

Ambulance ramping is not a new issue and continues to have significant ramification on those who need emergency care. Unacceptably, there have been incidences where elderly persons have waited hours for an ambulance to arrive, waited hours in the back of an ambulance for a bed or worse died waiting. As mentioned earlier, the COVID-19 pandemic has only accentuated and heightened the situation and the need for more staff and better planning to ensure services are available and staff capable to provide them.

Ambulance services are costly for older persons and create a barrier to accessing health, particularly emergency care. A free universal emergency ambulance service is something I support. Available in other states, it is a service I have been wanting to make available to South Australians for quite some time.

Other issues discussed in COTA document:

- COTAS SA Strength for Life Program: strength training program to be more active, remain independent and reduce risk of falling
- Improving oral health care to prevent more serious health issues (heart disease, poor nutrition, isolation and depression)

### **Social Inclusion**

As mentioned above, connecting to one's community, family and friends is essential to their wellbeing. COTA SA Rainbow Hub is an excellent program connecting LGBTI+ elders, who often live alone, are less likely to have children and rely on friends for care and support. Initiatives safeguarding and expanding programs for greater inclusion are supported.

Social inclusion also relies on transport and mobility. Your document explores the transport concession, transport options to the regions and road safety awareness for older drivers. Concessions - not solely transport concessions – need to be reviewed to ensure they provide adequate benefits to those who use them. More transport options and routes need to be made available to ensure individuals residing in the metropolitan area have access to the regions and vice versa.

For older South Australians who are not digitally equipped, travelling, and connecting in-person is important to maintaining relationships with family and friends. Fear of getting COVID-19 has decreased use of public transport by the elderly and more are forced to drive. As you may be aware, SA requires drivers to undertake a Practical Driving Assessment at 85 years and over and a health professional may recommend an assessment with an Accredited Audit Officer.<sup>3</sup> The Department for Infrastructure and Transport reported every year between 2015-2019, 23 older

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<sup>3</sup> Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure, 2019, "Obligations and Opportunities for Older Drivers", South Australian Government, available at: [https://dit.sa.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/575592/Moving\\_Right\\_Along\\_brochure\\_-\\_June\\_2019.pdf](https://dit.sa.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0006/575592/Moving_Right_Along_brochure_-_June_2019.pdf), [accessed on: 09/02/2022].

road users experienced fatalities and 94 were seriously injured on SA roads.<sup>4</sup> More needs to be put in place to ensure older drivers are confident behind the wheel and receive peer-to-peer road safety awareness – especially before sitting any tests.

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<sup>4</sup> Department for Infrastructure and Transport, 2020, “Older Road Users: Involved in Road Crashes in South Australia”, Government of South Australia, available at: [https://dit.sa.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0019/247330/Older\\_Road\\_Users\\_-\\_Road\\_Crash\\_Fact\\_Sheet.pdf](https://dit.sa.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/247330/Older_Road_Users_-_Road_Crash_Fact_Sheet.pdf), [accessed on: 09/02/2022].