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FRANK PANGALLO MLC
Members of the Legislative Council
Parliament of South Australia

Ms Jane Mussared
COTA SA

Email: JMussared@cotasa.org.au

Dear Ms Mussared

Thank you for providing SA-BEST with an advance copy of the COTA SA 2022 State Election Platform, outlining COTA's priorities for older South Australians in the forthcoming state election, and for meeting with us to discuss each of these in more detail.

As you know, we will continue to advocate strongly in regard to older and ageing South Australians and strongly agree with your view that there is a need to apply an ageing lens across every Government portfolio.

As Members of the Legislative Council, we are personally contacted by hundreds of constituents a year who raise serious concerns about a wide range of issues concerning older South Australians. These include access to quality health care, ageing and wellbeing support services, housing, elder abuse, employment, superannuation, transport and digital access, to name but a few.

These issues have only been amplified by the pandemic, with many families and older people feeling very isolated and let down by governments.

We will continue to endeavour to press for the implementation of all of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aged Care and to continually improve the quality and accessibility of services and supports to this growing sector of our community.

We have and will continue to advocate for CCTV in aged care and disabled care homes and have shown that we will proactively intervene where we have become aware of substandard care or mistreatment of older South Australians, for example in regard to inadequate care and staffing of a Whyalla aged care facility that was brought to our attention by concerned family members.

Please see below our responses to COTA's priorities and do not hesitate to contact us further as needed.

We look forward to continuing our close and productive relationship with COTA SA throughout the 55th South Australian Parliament.

Yours sincerely



Hon. Connie Bonaros MLC

1/03/2022



Hon. Frank Pangallo MLC

Recommendation 1

That the incoming state government immediately commissions the development of an Ageing in Country South Australia strategy, working with older people, local councils, businesses, government agencies and community groups to identify best practice examples and initiatives in response to critical issues in regional areas including housing, employment, digital inclusion, transport and health.

Response

SA-BEST strongly supports the development of an Ageing in Country South Australia strategy, to best plan for future services and needs of older people, to enable them to live where they choose to live, and ideally stay in their own homes for as long as possible.

SA-BEST is particularly concerned about the provision of quality affordable aged care services, health care and housing options in regional and remote South Australia including Yorke Peninsula, the Limestone Coast and Eyre Peninsula. We also recognise issues in outer suburban Adelaide, particularly in the northern and southern suburbs.

SA-BEST will strongly advocate for a parliamentary committee to look into and report on all issues relevant to ageing and older Australians living in South Australia, with the aim of producing a 5 year strategic plan for ageing and older South Australians inclusive of international and national best practices and new initiatives to ensure that older South Australian's enjoy a quality of life second to none.

Recommendation 2

That the incoming State Government funds COTA SA to establish a Country Engagement Program to work with older people and stakeholders in country areas to promote ageing well, build local capacity and support options for people to remain in their community as they age.
Estimated cost \$160,000 per annum.

Response

SA-BEST strongly supports a Country Engagement Program, especially in the more remote regional areas that lack necessary supports and services for older people, such as GPs, medical specialists, rehabilitation and ageing physiotherapists, hearing and optometry services.

However, SA-BEST would support a higher level of funding per annum than the amount recommended and believes that the state should pursue a state/Commonwealth joint funding partnership to maximise funds to achieve this strategic objective.

Recommendation 3

That the incoming state government maps, plans and sets targets for optimal levels of health and aged care staffing and services in country SA and then

reports regularly against the achievements of those targets.

Response

SA-BEST has been a strong and vocal advocate for older people throughout South Australia in particular in regional areas, where aged care services have been found to be completely unacceptable in terms of service provision, quality standards, protective equipment, levels and numbers of staff and supervision.

SA-BEST has continually highlighted failures in the system and has consistently called for urgent reform and improvement in levels and quality of health and aged care services and staffing.

SA-BEST strongly supports the implementation of the recommendations of the Commonwealth Royal Commission into Aged Care, including establishing targets re levels and numbers of health and aged care staffing throughout the sector, including country SA.

As above SA-BEST will pursue a parliamentary committee to review the current situation and to develop a five year strategic plan for older and ageing South Australians.

SA-BEST also calls for an expansion in training places and a requirement for a higher proportion of staff to be trained to certificate four level. Training needs to be ongoing and there need to be continuous improvement KPIs for aged care training and development.

Regular monitoring and reporting need to be increased from the current inadequate levels to ensure that aged care services do not fall beneath these standards and prescribed staffing ratios.

Recommendation 4

That the incoming state government research and funds innovative, evidence based, best practice programs that identify and target older people at risk of digital exclusion to help them to use the online world.

Response

SA-BEST strongly supports this recommendation, including the provision of paid hands on/ on the ground staffing and resources to facilitate and support online access and digital literacy in aged care homes, retirement villages and community settings, including private residences.

The reliance on volunteers to deliver digital literacy will not equitably address the current disadvantage and exclusions older people face as services move online, many of them almost exclusively online. Staff need to be trained and available to improve digital access as a right, not a privilege.

SA-BEST strongly advocates for telephone and postal voting and other technological solutions to ensure that older South Australians, especially in nursing homes, hospitals or other institutions are not disenfranchised.

Recommendation 5

That the incoming state government maintains non-online systems for access to information, support and all government funded services.

Response

SA-BEST strongly supports the retention of a locally staffed telephone and bricks and mortar/ shop front presence for all government services, for example Services SA.

SA-BEST is opposed to the closure of such services, particularly in regional areas, and especially where the population is ageing. SA-BEST is also opposed to the closure of bank shop fronts particularly in regional and more remote areas of South Australia.

SA-BEST strongly supports a more accessible and specialised translator service for older South Australians in these locations and on telephone lines.

As noted above SA-BEST strongly supports better electoral systems including the use of user appropriate technology, for older, ageing or isolated South Australians can exercise their right to vote.

Recommendation 6

That the incoming state government funds COTA SA to lead key stakeholders in a multi-year, targeted media and awareness campaign that confronts and addresses ageism.

Estimated cost \$500,000 per annum.

SA-BEST strongly supports this recommendation and calls for state-wide ageism education and training programmes to confront the issue, particularly in the not for profit, community and public services, such as housing, health and financial services.

As noted above SA-BEST strongly supports the development of a comprehensive Ageing Strategy for South Australia, inclusive of all of the key elements necessary to enable older people to age and live well.

SA-BEST introduced a Gender Equality Bill in 2021 which we will re-introduce into the new Parliament. This Bill deals with gendered age discrimination and disadvantage.

Recommendation 7

That the incoming state government funds a pilot project in regional South Australia to engage older workers and employers to trial new opportunities for mature employment and enterprise in country areas. This project should also investigate the work required to support upskilling, reskilling and workplace flexibility to create proactive employment opportunities for older people with a focus on older women.

Response

SA-BEST recognises that older people, especially women, are often disadvantaged in the workforce, superannuation and financial independence due to a range of factors, including ageism and time out of the paid workforce raising children or caring for others including disabled and older people.

SA-BEST strongly supports a number of pilot projects across a range of regional South Australian locations and at least one metropolitan location, to foster and create employment opportunities for older workers, redundant workers, or workers who have been out of the workforce for some time.

SA-BEST has introduced a Gender Equality Bill which would ensure that gender and age are not able to be used to discriminate against older people in the workforce.

In addition SA-BEST will advocate with our federal colleagues for pensioners and health care card lower income older people to have a higher threshold of earnings, on which they pay tax, before their pension or payment is affected. This would have a very wide range of benefits to older people and the economy more widely, addressing labour shortages, keeping more people engaged in the workforce for longer and all of the mental and physical health benefits that come with this.

Recommendation 8

That the incoming state government increases the quantity of public and social housing available for older people by at least 100 homes per year.

Response

SA-BEST calls for a much bigger increase in public and social housing for older people than this recommendation. As above this needs to be a key element of a five year targeted Ageing Strategy for South Australia.

SA-BEST recognises that 21% of older people are still paying off a mortgage, and 7% are still reliant on private rentals, and that for many older South Australians on a low income, access to public and social housing is their only affordable option.

As advised by COTA people who own their own homes spend about 4% of their income on housing and people in rental accommodation spend about 40% of their income on often insecure housing. Frequent moving and the costs associated with this, often from unaffordable rental increases exacerbate the problem of housing for many older South Australians.

SA-BEST is very concerned that older people are at increasing and real risk of homelessness and that as many as 10,000 South Australians over 65 years of age are already in housing stress. SA-BEST calls for an increase in public housing overall to levels that address the increasing demand and growing waiting lists that have come about in part due to almost no public housing availability, private rental shortages and steep rent increases.

SA-BEST also supports innovative new housing solutions for older and lower income people such as small but independent living developments and villages where residents have security of tenure in affordable and functional, energy efficient housing, close to public transport and essential services. Larger developments should have on site medical and aged care support services available, just as private establishments do.

SA-BEST will exert pressure on the incoming Government to call on the Commonwealth Government to maintain the National Rental Affordability Scheme beyond 2026 and for an increase in the Commonwealth Rent Assistance Scheme.

Recommendation 9

That the incoming state government uses age as a criterion of priority for housing for disadvantaged older people.

Response

SA-BEST strongly supports this recommendation, as the private rental market is beyond the reach of many due to competition, unaffordability and lack of supply. Older people who do not own a home are particularly disadvantaged as they do not meet any of the current priority criteria such as being in crisis, having dependent children, disability, mental illness or domestic violence circumstances.

However as above, housing needs to be suitable, affordable and have access to public transport and essential services so that older people are not further disadvantaged by isolation and lack of services including transport.

Recommendation 10

That the incoming state government establishes a specialised advocacy and housing service that assists vulnerable older people living in housing stress to secure ongoing accommodation.

Response

SA-BEST strongly supports this recommendation but notes that it must be part of an overall SA Ageing Strategy that includes an exponential expansion of public housing and affordable housing projects.

Whilst there are generalist housing advocacy services available for low income or homeless groups, older people often struggle to access the assistance they need to secure long term affordable accommodation which also meets their transport and health care needs because they find mainstream services highly competitive and impossible to navigate.

Recommendation 11

That the incoming state government provides funding to enable the Strength for Life program to continue to meet the needs of older South Australians including in regional and low-SEIFA areas, with dedicated funding to develop a next generation model targeting CALD and First Nation Elders and the roll out of online access for isolated and regional South Australians.

Estimated cost \$290,000 per annum.

Response

SA-BEST strongly supports COTA SA's participant-centred, progressive strength training program Strength for Life and will advocate for its expansion. It is vital that older South Australians have access to activities that improve their quality of life and longevity through better physical and mental health.

Recommendation 12

That the incoming state government prioritises and accelerates strategies to improve health outcomes and measures to reduce ambulance ramping for older people.

Response

SA-BEST is strongly opposed to ambulance ramping at any South Australian hospital, but particularly for older and more vulnerable people, and particularly in regional areas where there are often no GPs or alternatives to hospital and the hospital is some distance away.

SA-BEST will strongly support increased funding of ambulance services and health services including accident and emergency departments, especially where older people comprise a high percentage of the population.

Recommendation 13

That the incoming state government makes ambulance travel free for all Commonwealth Seniors Health Card holders.

Response

SA-BEST strongly supports this recommendation and will call for a range of concessions for all Seniors Health Card holders including free car registration, an annual fuel card, an annual rail pass for interstate travel, free peak hour travel and free ambulance.

Recommendation 14

That the incoming state government, with the Australian Government, addresses access to oral health care services for older South Australians, with an absolute priority on older people on low incomes.

Response

SA-BEST strongly supports this recommendation and would support an urgent and immediate increase in the number of dentists and dental assistants employed in the public dental system, to the level required to ensure that waiting lists for dental and oral health services for any older or low income South Australian are immediately reduced to acceptable timelines.

SA-BEST also calls for dental and oral care services to be maintained at a level where future waiting periods do not exceed reasonable and sustainable levels and that emergency care is always readily and easily accessible.

Recommendation 15

That the incoming state government funds the COTA SA Rainbow Hub to safeguard its current footprint and expand its reach to LGBTI+ elders living outside metropolitan Adelaide.

Estimated cost \$140,000 per annum.

Response

SA-BEST supports this recommendation. We recognise that LGBTIQ+ people can need specialist support to live well into old age, given that many of them may have faced severe exclusion, disadvantage and discrimination throughout their lives.

Recommendation 16

That the incoming state government funds the extension of transport concessions beyond off-peak times.

Response

SA-BEST strongly supports this recommendation for all transport concession holders. See above notes re concessions under recommendation 13.

SA-BEST notes that many medical appointments, voluntary work, shopping, family commitments or opportunities to work or socialise do not fall within off-peak times, and that the value that this increase in mobility will provide to the community is far in excess of the cost.

Recommendation 17

That the incoming state government reviews transport options in regional South Australia as part of an Ageing in Country South Australia Strategy.

Response

SA-BEST strongly supports this recommendation as there are often no transport options available to regional and country older people, including those in the Adelaide foothills and newly expanded southern and northern suburbs.

SA-BEST also calls for the retention and expansion of the taxi voucher scheme and free rail travel, as a preferred option of many older people, including interstate rail services such as the SA to Victoria rail service.

SA-BEST calls for free car registration for Commonwealth Seniors Concession Card holders and a fuel and travel card subsidy scheme for older South Australians, similar to that of NSW where pensioners are issued with a \$250 fuel/travel voucher annually.

Recommendation 18

That the incoming state government reinvests in COTA SA to provide peer to peer road safety awareness and education initiatives for older people.

Estimated cost \$150,000 per annum.

Response

SA-BEST supports this recommendation, but also calls for suitable alternatives to be developed for older people including driverless and solar/electric vehicles and scooter, share car pools like Go Get for older people, so that older people can enjoy a level of mobility and not become socially isolated, even though they may no longer decide to own a car or hold a licence.

As above SA-BEST strongly supports increased transport options for older people and welcomes innovative solutions that have been trialled overseas with some success.