

COTA SA OUTLINES KEY STATE BUDGET PRIORITIES FOR OLDER SOUTH AUSTRALIANS

COTA SA, the state's peak body for older South Australians, has outlined three key priorities in its 2024-25 State Budget submission, focusing on health, housing security, and ageing well in regional South Australia, ahead of its release on Thursday June 6.

COTA SA's recommendations for focus areas and investment aim to address the needs of the 700,000 South Australians aged 50+. Older South Australians currently comprise about 39 per cent of the state's population, and this number is predicted to increase to 47 per cent by 2041.

COTA SA Chief Executive, Miranda Starke, said, "Our key recommendations have been shaped by our consultation with thousands of older South Australians about the experiences and challenges that impact their everyday lives.

"Our budget submission reflects that there is no universal experience for older South Australians, but rather an enormous diversity within the group. While some older people are financially secure, many are struggling, experiencing cost of living pressures, housing stress, and have difficulties accessing health services and transport."

PRIORITY ONE: Improving access to health and community connections for older South Australians, including free ambulance services for those on the full Age Pension.

The first submission recommendation is to remove barriers for older South Australians accessing urgent paramedic care by providing free ambulance services for South Australians receiving the full Age Pension.

South Australia is out of step with the rest of the country in making paramedic services affordable and accessible for older and vulnerable people. South Australia's emergency ambulance call-out fee is one of the highest in Australia and one of the last states to provide free ambulance services to groups of older people.

A public awareness program would complement this initiative on appropriate usage and alternative pathways for receiving urgent and non-urgent healthcare and assistance.

Another recommendation is to invest in enhancing patient records and billing systems to help with timely appropriate care outcomes.

“For many older people in our communities, it is unfortunately a stark reality that connections and ability to access essential health services are out of reach. This can negatively impact their safety and the quality of care that they receive,” Miranda said.

PRIORITY TWO: Ensuring housing security for older South Australians, with a focus on older women.

The second submission recommendation is ensuring housing security for older South Australians, especially for older women, who are particularly at risk of housing stress and experiencing homelessness, because of a lifetime of lower wages, lower superannuation, and asset losses in separations.

In 2023, COTA SA was proud to be a member of the State Government’s Housing Security for Older Women Taskforce whose recommendation report, *Improving housing security for older women*, includes 40 recommendations for short and long-term solutions to the housing crisis facing this group.

COTA SA acknowledges the progress the State Government has made to address some of the recommendations in the report to date, and would like to see even more action taken, backed by significant additional funding so that this issue can be addressed in a systemic and sustainable way.

Miranda further explains COTA SA’s advocacy for improving housing security for older women, “COTA SA has long advocated for an early intervention service for older people when they are at risk of homelessness. When older people are assisted early with housing solutions, the social and financial return is evident in a reduced need for homelessness services, hospital emergency departments, and crisis response from police or paramedics.”

Part of the recommendation is to ensure every government-led residential development includes a portion of social housing, as well as further financial commitment to grow public housing. Targeted subsidies to attract build-to-rent developers and operators would increase the supply of affordable rentals available to older people.

Explaining this further, Miranda said, “Secure housing is rapidly moving out of reach for an increasing number of older people, which is compounded by ageism, long periods of underemployment prior to age pension eligibility, and poor health. To keep older people in their own homes as they age, they need affordable housing that is close to amenities.

“Build-to-rent dwellings are private rentals that provide tenants with security of tenure and community connection. Build-to-rent can also provide safe, accessible and adaptable quality housing which would enable older people to age in their own homes and communities,” Miranda continued.

PRIORITY THREE: Enabling older people to age well in regional South Australia.

The final submission recommendation is enabling older people to age well in regional areas, which includes reviewing transport demand and current infrastructure to improve access to transport for older people in their regions.

“Unfortunately, many of South Australia’s regional towns do not have timely, appropriate or affordable transport options, all of which creates a barrier to older people’s independence,” Miranda said.

COTA SA proposes an innovative place-based pilot to test the feasibility of different transport solutions in regional areas to support the independence of older people living in regional South Australia. This may include a “hop-on, hop-off” service or re-deploying school buses during school hours.

To help with virtual healthcare services for older people in regional South Australia, COTA SA has recommended the government address infrastructure gaps to online connectivity and support older people in using their digital devices.

“Most older people living in regional areas love being there and support their communities through volunteer work, as well as the business owners and employees who make valuable contributions to their local economy. Keeping connected to their communities through adequate transport, and being able to access virtual healthcare, are vital parts of ageing well in regional areas,” Miranda explained.

COTA SA is looking forward to seeing what the 2024-25 State Budget has to offer and will continue to strongly advocate to shape the rollout of State Government initiatives so that the voices of older South Australians are heard.

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ABOUT COTA SA

COTA (Council on the Ageing) SA is an older people’s movement and the peak body that represents the rights, interests and futures of the more than 700,000 South Australians aged 50+. COTA SA stands with older South Australians to create new images and new expectations for the older years. Understanding the diverse views and experiences of older South Australians is core to achieving COTA SA’s purpose to advance the rights, interests and futures of South Australians as we age. The organisation helps to reframe the way we age and values ageing as a time of possibility, opportunity and influence.

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