

MEDIA RELEASE

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Short-term Federal Budget measures leave SA seniors with big questions

Last night's Federal Budget provided important short-term financial relief from cost-of-living pressures, however COTA SA says it failed to address the biggest challenge for low earning older South Australians – the housing crisis.

"More than 10,000 older South Australians are experiencing debilitating housing stress, yet the budget was completely silent on this issue," said COTA SA chief executive Jane Mussared.

"Increased funding is needed fast to scale up social and public housing options and support older people who are struggling to keep a roof over their heads.

"We also need substantial relief from rising housing costs by increasing the Commonwealth Rent Assistance beyond indexation."

Ms Mussared says the 50 percent reduction to the fuel excise will provide relief for older people at the petrol bowser, especially those in regional areas.

"Likewise, the \$250 cash payment for pensioners is welcome and provides short-term support with rising cost of living pressures but it's a one-off," she said. "As older people look longer term, there is considerable anxiety about what happens next and how they will continue to juggle very stretched priorities."

The Federal Government's \$340 million investment to address medication safety in aged care homes is a positive and important initiative, Ms Mussared said.

"However, access to oral health care for older South Australians continues to be ignored," she said.

"This is care that would prevent thousands of unnecessary hospital admissions, stop unnecessary pain, and promote essential nutrition.

"Oral health must be part of Medicare. In the meantime, we need to ensure older people on low incomes and in aged care can access oral health care through a Seniors Dental Program, as was recommended by the Aged Care Quality and Safety Royal Commission."

A key issue for aged care is maintaining a skilled workforce, Ms Mussared says.

“The aged care sector is riddled with staff shortages,” she said. “Workers are moving out of aged care, not moving in.

“There needs to be a substantial increase in aged care wages to make the sector a more appealing career option, overcome staff shortages, and to attract people to the 33,800 new aged care training places.

“Subscription to the new aged care places will not materialise unless there are staff to fill them. The forward estimates as far as we can see have not taken a substantial wage increase into account, so we must take in good faith that whichever party wins government, they will ensure this can be funded.”

Ms Mussared said the Federal Budget also missed an opportunity to increase older people's participation in the workforce.

“While an increasing number of industries are experiencing staff shortages, relaxing the pension wage income test would create incentives for older workers to return to the workforce or increase the hours they work,” she said.

“This was a win-win opportunity that has gone begging.”

According to COTA SA, older South Australians are increasingly concerned about the state of the planet and the impact of climate change. They want to leave the planet in good shape for future generations.

“We think many older South Australians will be disappointed in the very modest investment in addressing climate change,” Ms Mussared said. “While mitigation is important, reducing carbon emissions is the real game changer.”

COTA SA is an older people's movement and the peak body representing the rights, interests, and futures of more than 633,000 older South Australians aged over 50.

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