

## SUBMISSION TO

*South Australia's 20-Year State Infrastructure Strategy Discussion Paper*

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COTA SA welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to *South Australia's 20-Year State Infrastructure Strategy discussion paper*.

COTA SA is an older people's movement run by, for and with older people. We represent the rights, interests and futures of around 700,000 (39%) older South Australians. We engage widely with older South Australians across the state and the lived experiences of the diverse community of older South Australians shape and inform COTA SA's policy and advocacy work, including through our Policy Council, Regional Advisory Groups, LGBTI+ Rainbow Hub and Climate Change Group.

COTA SA cares deeply about ageing well and is committed to ensuring older South Australians have the opportunity, capacity and ability to navigate the changes of ageing in their place of choice. *South Australia's 20-Year State Infrastructure Strategy* is an opportunity to deliberately plan to support South Australians to age well, now and into the future. As the oldest state by demographic on mainland Australia, South Australia is uniquely placed to lead the way.

## Planning for Ageing Well

In the many models of ageing well, the most common elements that support and empower navigating change are **health** (including physical and mental wellbeing), **security** (including housing and financial security), **purpose** (including volunteering, working and self-actualisation) and **connection** (including having a sense of belonging and social connection).

COTA SA strongly advocates for an infrastructure strategy and planning system that lays the foundations for communities that are age-friendly, cohesive, inclusive, resilient, adaptable and accessible. Strategic design and planning that allows people to age in their home and in their community, leads to positive health and wellbeing, and minimises cost and disruption to the individual, their community and ultimately, the public health system.

In response to *South Australia's 20-Year State Infrastructure Strategy* discussion paper, we recommend:

- Strategic Objective 2 specifically identifies our ageing population and is changed to *support a growing **and an ageing** population*.
- Proactive action to close the digital divide through structured and ongoing support, addressing prohibitive costs and building infrastructure that provides reliable digital connectivity to support people to use it.
- Strategic planning of communities that allow people to age in their home and in their community.
- Strategic planning of diverse housing options that meet the diverse needs of the older population, now and into the future, whilst not precluding an older person from being able to choose where or the type of dwelling they live in.
- The incorporation of social housing into every government-led and Renewal SA residential development.
- Consideration is given to how the confidence of travellers can increase the patronage of public transport in addition to well-planned infrastructure.
- Infrastructure and digital connectivity can support a more efficient and productive health system through the enabling of virtual health care and hospital avoidance hubs.

COTA SA has a track record of success connecting with and delivering programs with and for older South Australians. We can bring value as a for-purpose partner to achieve the best outcomes for older people, and can play an active role to ensure our strategies meet ageing well outcomes. We welcome the opportunity to collaborate with the government to shape the infrastructure strategy and subsequent plans.

## Issues

While ageing cuts across every aspect of planning, on reviewing the discussion paper, we have focused our submission on the areas of greatest interest to ageing well.

### Megatrends

Each of the five megatrends (p8) have an impact on older South Australians and COTA SA draws particular attention to *shifting population, workforce and skills base; push towards an inclusive society and economy; and climate change mitigation and adaptation*, as issues that will be most impactful to ageing well.

Another trend, which relates to the megatrend *push towards an inclusive society and economy* is the increasing rate of isolation and loneliness. This affects population groups of all ages and older Australians present a high risk group for social isolation due to a number of life stage factors which are associated with ageing: living alone, no longer having a partner/spouse, chronic illness, mobility issues, loss of friends and family, physical isolation, transport challenges and digital illiteracy. Results of the 2021 HILDA survey<sup>1</sup> showed that just under 1 in 5 women and just over 1 in 6 men aged 55+ “often felt very lonely”. Loneliness can increase the risk of severe health conditions, including stroke and heart disease, and can increase the chance of early death by 26%. This places significant strain on our public health system and our care systems.

### Liveable and well-planned places attract skilled people, support a growing population and create prosperous communities (Strategic Objective 2).

We strongly recommend that this objective specifically identifies our ageing population and is changed to “*support a growing **and an ageing** population*”.

The *discussion paper* presents data on our ageing population (p8), yet it is not identified in Objective 2. This population shift is significant. Our society has worked hard to achieve longer and healthier lives — both a medical and a social triumph. Despite this, older South Australians continue to face very real and significant challenges, including inadequate services and infrastructure to grow older in regional South Australia, cost of living pressures, social and digital exclusion, unaffordable and inaccessible healthcare, housing stress and homelessness and diminishing employment opportunities. If future plans and strategies do not explicitly address our ageing population, there is a real risk that communities will not be suitably designed to allow and optimise access to social supports, services, spaces and opportunities that enable people to age well and age in their communities.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/australias-welfare-2023-data-insights/contents/social-isolation-loneliness-and-wellbeing>

**What are the barriers to increased adoption of digital technology to improve productivity? (Consultation question 5).**

We consider that one of the biggest barriers is a lack of support and poor design for end-users. People aged 55 years and over have less digital ability than the national average, with those aged 65-74 and 75+ scoring significantly lower than the national average when it comes to digital inclusion<sup>2</sup>. South Australia is one of the least digitally included states and some of our oldest demographic regions significantly lag behind. For these regional areas, access to technology and devices and having the ability to use them is fundamental to digital inclusion.

Being on the wrong side of the digital divide impacts quality of life, causing mounting isolation and a sense of being on the outside. It takes away connections with community at a time when more older people than ever live alone with fewer opportunities for social contact as part of daily routines, and it presents a barrier to get information, access services and participate in social engagement opportunities.

We need proactive action to close the digital divide – for older people and for others. Non-online systems must be maintained, and structured support is required on an ongoing basis to help people learn and then stay up to date. The prohibitive costs and unreliable internet connections that undermine equitable access must also be addressed. Infrastructure must provide reliable digital connectivity to support people to use it. This is particularly important in regional areas where digital isolation compounds geographic isolation.

**How can South Australia better coordinate infrastructure investment to support a growing population? (Consultation question 7).**

COTA SA notes that the *Greater Adelaide Regional Plan*, which we are pleased to see referenced in the *South Australia's 20-Year State Infrastructure Strategy Discussion Paper*, considers infill development an important consideration in how the greater Adelaide region should accommodate a growing population. Indeed, there is evidence that shows that established areas with medium-density housing is linked to higher liveability<sup>3</sup>.

There are numerous examples of creative approaches to medium-density housing which could be considered. For example:

- the Bowden development provides medium-density accommodation as part of a well-planned development<sup>4</sup>.
- Nightingale Housing<sup>5</sup> builds smaller cooperative-style medium-density developments. These are mainly in Victoria but is commencing in South Australia. Its underlying focus

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<sup>2</sup> [The ADII - Australian Digital Inclusion Index](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Place Score housing survey: Data shows density key to community vibe | The Advertiser \(adelaidenow.com.au\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> <https://renewalsa.sa.gov.au/projects/bowden/>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.nightingalehousing.org/?gclid=EAlalQobChMIjFWG8oec\\_wlVVTdyCh2--QRzEAAYASAAEgIv3vD\\_BWE](https://www.nightingalehousing.org/?gclid=EAlalQobChMIjFWG8oec_wlVVTdyCh2--QRzEAAYASAAEgIv3vD_BWE)

is, “building apartments that are socially, financially and environmentally sustainable....homes should be built for people, not profit”.

Given that there may be a shortage of parcels of land which can be developed for medium-density housing in some locations, a further suggestion is to explore the possibility of redeveloping suburban and regional shopping centres. Most are either one or two storey complexes, often with large expanses of asphalt for car parking and frequently located close to bus routes. If the sites are redeveloped fully to a medium density (say, five storeys), the development could include extensive solar cells and green roofs, eliminate the heat effect of the asphalt, address housing shortages and lack of variety in housing options, address transport needs, and incorporate design features which foster community connection.

### What can be done to support sufficient, fit-for-purpose housing to improve housing affordability (Consultation question 8).

Secure housing is fundamental to the health and wellbeing of older South Australians, which is why home and community is one of three strategic priorities in South Australia’s Plan for Ageing Well 2020-2025<sup>6</sup> a plan which should not sit in isolation to other state government plans and strategies.

A variety of factors mean that secure and affordable housing is rapidly moving out of reach for an increasing number of older South Australians. Older women are particularly at risk because of a lifetime of lower wages, lower superannuation, and asset losses in separations. Older LGBTI+ people advise that access to housing as they age puts them at particular risk of homelessness.

COTA SA has contributed to the relevant insights and recommendations included in the Housing Security for Older Women Taskforce and its report commissioned by the Minister for Human Services.

Insecure housing is compounded by ageism, long periods of underemployment prior to age pension eligibility and poor health. Indeed, a recent study found evidence to suggest that, “challenging housing circumstances negatively affect health through faster biological ageing<sup>7</sup>.” The study further found that the reversible nature of biological ageing means that there is significant potential for housing policy to improve health outcomes.

The majority of older people want to age in place and stay in their own homes as they age. Enabling this includes housing that is affordable, adaptable, accessible and close to amenities. It is important this does not preclude older people making the choice of the type of housing they

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<sup>6</sup> [South+Australia's+Plan+for+Ageing+Well+2020-2025 WEB.pdf \(sahealth.sa.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Are housing circumstances associated with faster epigenetic ageing? | Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health \(bmj.com\)](#)

can live in. Like older people themselves who are diverse in their lifestyle preferences, incomes, identity, cultural background and relationships, there is not one-size-fits-all model when it comes to our housing needs as we age. Older people want to access a diverse range of housing options including private rental, owner-occupied properties, retirement village living, residential parks, lifestyle villages, social housing and residential aged care. It is crucial that older people can choose the type of housing that is right for their needs. This includes not placing an expectation on older people that they down-size at a particular point in their lives. The system must enable a variety of housing options suitable for all ages and abilities.

Housing design must ensure that all future housing meets livability standards; particularly relating to age-related mobility and accessibility requirements, and energy efficiency standards. The National Construction Code is a key mechanism to ensure these standards are being met at a minimum, and future housing must at least meet if not far exceed these standards.

The thermal efficiency of existing dwellings must also be improved, particularly in social housing and private rental properties. Addressing thermal efficiency will have positive impacts on peoples' health, cost of living and the environment. For example, in jurisdictions such as the United Kingdom, proposals are being put forward to improve the quality of existing houses<sup>8</sup> to make them more comfortable in extreme weather.

Our key recommendation for master-planned developments and urban infill which relate to affordable housing is that every government-led / Renewal SA residential development must include a proportion of social housing. There are a number of government-led / Renewal SA residential developments underway currently which do not provide for any social housing. This is a missed opportunity. It is well recognised that the demand for social housing far outweighs the supply. This can be addressed in two ways: grow the public and community housing sector (social housing) and replace or renovate houses that are no longer safe or fit for purpose. SACOSS argues that around 1,000 new social housing dwellings must be built each year to rebuild the stock of social housing. Anything less will merely cover population growth<sup>9</sup>. Planned consideration must be given to increasing affordable and social housing in sufficient numbers to address housing stress and put downward pressure on the private rental market. Social housing cannot be considered in isolation from the broader planning approach and the relevant legislation must be amended to guarantee this.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://demos.co.uk/research/home-improvement-a-triple-dividend-part-one-boosting-the-british-economy/>

<sup>9</sup> [SA's housing needs under spotlight at national cabinet | SACOSS](#)

**How can we improve public transport services across Adelaide and outer metropolitan areas to encourage greater patronage (Consultation question 9).**

Access to adequate public and community transport in both the metropolitan area and in regional South Australia is fundamental to ageing well. It enables older people to be active in their communities and to maintain purposeful and independent lives that are connected to family, friends, employment, services and interests.

Quality, accessible and reliable public transport is more likely to be valued by older people who do not drive due to age-related changes, or who are on low and fixed incomes and unable to afford private transport. Making public transport free for Seniors Card holders in 2022 resulted in a 40% increase in usage over the following year, showing that increasing access to public transport results in more older South Australians able to participate in volunteering roles, to commute to their place of employment, to undertake caring roles and to partake in social, economic and recreational activities. These connections are fundamental to ageing well and planning for public transport infrastructure is important. Further, it gives older people an alternative to driving and thereby contributes to South Australia's carbon emissions reduction goal.

Even with free public transport, some older people do not feel confident to use public transport because of the digitisation of timetables, ticketing and information, fewer bus stops and no printed timetables at stations. COTA SA's *Seniors on Board* program found that the confidence of older travellers is enhanced by community education that helps to navigate travel planning and use. Funding this type of program offers a rich opportunity to build patronage of public transport by older people.

**What investments would support a more efficient and productive health system that meets our growing and changing needs? (Consultation question 10).**

Older Australians are significant and growing users of acute health services. In the four years leading up to 2016-17, the average number of people aged 65-74 who were discharged from or died in hospital increased by 6% per year<sup>10</sup>. In South Australia in 2020–21, 57% of public hospital discharges and 64% of patient days were for people aged 55 and over<sup>11</sup>. A first admission to hospital results in a higher risk of avoidable rehospitalisation<sup>12</sup> particularly in older people.

Admissions and readmissions to hospital can be stressful for older people and their families, and places strain on an already stressed tertiary health system. There are instances where

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/hospitals/ahs-2016-17-admitted-patientcare/summary>

<sup>11</sup> Admitted patients - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (aihw.gov.au)

<sup>12</sup> Harvey, Getal (2021) An integrated knowledge translation approach to address avoidable rehospitalisations and unplanned admissions for older people in South Australia: implementation and evaluation program, Implementation Science Communications, 3:36 References

readmissions could be avoided through improved clinical management delivered outside of the hospital system<sup>13</sup>. The SA Virtual Care Service and hospital avoidance hubs, initiatives that were significantly invested in through the 2023/24 state budget, are important services that provide high quality and safe care outside of the hospital system.

COTA SA believes that an infrastructure strategy that supports an expansion of in-home virtual healthcare services and hospital avoidance hubs, that reduce unnecessary hospital admissions including emergency department presentations, and unplanned hospital readmissions will support a more efficient and productive health system. The infrastructure strategy must support these emerging healthcare solutions, including through digital connectivity, particularly in regional areas and planning for physical buildings that are located centrally and are easy to access.

**How can we think differently about infrastructure investment to support equitable access and a more inclusive society? (Consultation question 13).**

The role that infrastructure planning plays, through housing, health and cultural facilities, and transport and digital connectivity infrastructure is significant in enabling older people to have accessible options for living and moving about their local areas so that they can remain active community members for as long as possible.

It is important that we invest in infrastructure that builds communities that are age-friendly, cohesive, inclusive, resilient, and accessible. Our infrastructure strategy must design and build an ecosystem that supports an ageing population and supports older people to age well in their place of choice. Such an ecosystem includes public and community transport and active travel, housing (affordable, adaptable, close to amenities), digital accessibility, climate adaptation, green spaces, accessible and safe communities that allow older people to stay active, cool and warm refuges to cope with extreme weather events, health and aged care services and community connection.

### **Climate resilient adaptation**

Older South Australians have a deep commitment to reduce the severity and impact of climate change for today's community and for future generations. The adverse effect of climate change on the health of the community is evident in the rising cost of energy, heat and cold-related ill health and extreme weather events. The impacts of climate change are disproportionately felt by those on low and fixed incomes and vulnerable community members, including a substantial proportion of older people who are renters, as they will have the least capacity to mitigate climate change and adapt to extreme weather conditions.

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<sup>13</sup> The Business Case for People Powered Health, Nesta, UK, April 2013



We note the references to climate change throughout the *discussion paper* and there is a clear statement of intent to invest in infrastructure with mitigation and adaptation to climate change in mind.

COTA SA believes that the future impact of climate change on South Australia will highlight the importance of community and social cohesion. Provision for community-building activities and projects such as community gardens, cool/warm refuges in days of extreme heat or cold (such as being explored currently by the City of Campbelltown), community batteries for solar electricity, and community virtual power plants we expect will be the sorts of activities that South Australians will search out to help them through the extremes of weather.

Tree canopy and green spaces are also important, not only for their cooling effects, but to provide environments that enable active travel and connection to nature.

### **Safer streets and spaces**

Feeling safe in your own home and community is important for wellbeing and is especially important to consider how this is enabled through infrastructure planning, ensuring protective services and technology are planned for and built and digital connectivity exists to enable this technology. Safe streets and spaces are particularly important for communities that disproportionately experience discrimination, including LGBTI+ communities and survivors of domestic violence, including a growing cohort of older women living alone.

### **For further information and discussion**

COTA SA looks forward to participating in the engagement on the 20 year State Infrastructure Strategy. We would be pleased to meet with Infrastructure SA to discuss our submission. Please contact Miranda Starke in the first instance.

### **Acknowledgement of Country**

*COTA SA acknowledges and respects Aboriginal people as the traditional custodians of the land of South Australia. We honour Aboriginal peoples' continuing connection to Country and recognise that their sovereignty was never ceded. We pay our respects to First Nations Elders past, present and emerging and extend that respect to all Aboriginal people.*