

SUBMISSION TO THE

Eyre and Western Regional Plan

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Submission authorised by

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Introduction

COTA SA welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Eyre and Western Regional Plan. 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 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.

Our population is ageing. In June 2020, approximately 16% of Australians were aged 65 and over and this is projected to rise to 21-23% by 2066¹. Our ageing population should be a major trend and driver that will shape the future of planning in South Australia.

COTA SA is committed to ensuring older South Australians have the opportunity, capacity, and ability to navigate the changes of ageing in their place of choice. The Eyre and Western Regional Plan is an opportunity to deliberately plan to support South Australians to age well, now and into the future.

We have responded to the draft plan where we feel we can meaningfully contribute to decisions that could improve the quality of life for older South Australians for the next generation.

¹ [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Older Australians, July 2024](#)

People, Housing and Liveability

COTA SA supports access to safe, secure and affordable housing. Our planning system must enable a variety of housing options suitable for all ages and abilities. Most older people want to age in place and stay in their own homes and chosen communities as they age². To achieve this, housing should be affordable, adaptable, accessible and close to amenities. It is important this does not preclude older people making a choice on the type of housing they can live in. Like older people themselves who are diverse in their lifestyle preferences, incomes, identity, cultural background and relationships, there is no one-size-fits-all model when it comes to our housing needs as we age.

COTA SA welcomes the *Eyre and Western Regional Plan's* commitment to accommodate projected population growth in the Eyre and Western regions. We are particularly encouraged by its recognition of the need for increased housing supply and its stated intention to support diverse housing options that meet the needs of people at different stages of life.

While the Plan acknowledges changing demographics, including an ageing population and smaller household sizes, it lacks specific planning responses to meet the housing needs of older people. This is a significant omission, given the ageing demographic across regional South Australia and the widespread preference among older people to remain living independently in their communities as they age. COTA SA also urges planning for a broader mix of housing options that reflect the diverse preferences of older people. This includes more adaptable homes through universal design, and housing models such as co-housing, Build-to-Rent, retirement living that support downsizing and community connection³.

COTA SA welcomes the inclusion of social housing in the Plan as part of the strategy to accommodate future growth. However, the Plan lacks detail about how much social housing is proposed or how this will meet the needs of the region's most vulnerable. Without clear targets, there is a risk that this commitment will not be translated into action. COTA SA has consistently advocated for every government-led or Renewal SA residential development to include a proportion of social housing, yet recent projects have often failed to do so—missing critical opportunities to address unmet need. As SACOSS has identified, at least 1,000 new social housing dwellings per year are required across South Australia just to rebuild the current stock⁴. Anything less will fail to keep up with population growth.

COTA SA recommends that the Plan:

- Plans for diverse housing stock including Build-to-Rent and retirement living models, co-housing, and smaller homes that suit ageing in place of choice for older people.
- Supports investment in social housing in regional towns, in line with SACOSS's recommendation of at least 1,000 new social housing dwellings per year to meet existing need.

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Older Australians, Housing and living arrangements*, July 2024

³ *The Australian, Community living provides healthier outcomes for longer*, December 2024

⁴ SACOSS, *Policy Brief: Public Housing*, February 2022

Productive Economy – Health and Aged Care Services

Access to health and aged care is a critical issue for older people living in the Eyre and West regional locations. Many face long travel distances, workforce shortages, and limited availability of services, particularly primary care, aged care and allied health. These challenges often lead to poorer health outcomes and preventable hospital admissions. Older Australians account for 42% of hospital admissions and 49% of patient bed days nationally⁵. Yet those in regional and remote areas are least likely to access the services they need to age well in place.

COTA SA's engagement across regional South Australia highlights that long wait times, extensive travel distances and a lack of coordinated services contribute to poorer health outcomes and preventable hospital admissions. These issues are compounded by digital exclusion, social isolation and rising cost-of-living pressures.

COTA SA recognises that employment lands in the Eyre and Western regions must not only support industry and resource sectors but also enable the growth of essential service industries such as health, aged care and social support. The new Aged Care Act and Support at Home program reflect a national shift toward enabling older people to age in place for longer. Achieving this in regional South Australia requires a care workforce that is mobile, accessible, and embedded in the communities it serves. To meet this challenge, employment zoning must accommodate health and care-related services and infrastructure in strategically located areas. Co-locating services within employment precincts can facilitate service delivery, improve workforce attraction and retention, and enhance access for older residents.

COTA SA recommends that the Plan:

- Zone for the growth of essential service industries, including health, aged care and social support, particularly in key townships.
- Plan for land use and infrastructure that supports a mobile care workforce, enabling delivery of in-home services under the Aged Care Act and Support at Home program.

Natural Resources, Environment and Landscapes

Older people are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, especially those living alone, managing chronic health conditions, or residing in isolated or poorly serviced areas of the Eyre and Western regions. Heatwaves, bushfires, drought and floods pose serious risks to health and wellbeing, and these events are projected to become more frequent and severe. COTA SA takes the threat of climate change seriously. Through our Climate Change Group and regional consultations, older people have consistently expressed concern about climate risks—and a desire to be part of the solution. Our Statement of Interest on Climate Change outlines our commitment to action⁶.

⁵ [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Public hospital admissions growing faster than private, May 2019](#)

⁶ [COTA SA, Climate Change Statement of Interest](#)

The *Eyre and Western Regional Plan* acknowledges that the region will face increased temperatures, fire risk and extreme weather (pp. 26–28). It also outlines welcome steps like supporting tree planting and green infrastructure initiatives to benefit local communities (p. 18). However, the Plan gives limited attention to the thermal performance of housing - an essential factor for climate resilience in older populations.

Many older people in the Eyre and Western regions rely on air-conditioning during heatwaves, yet rising energy costs and poor housing efficiency make this increasingly unaffordable—especially for renters and those on low incomes. Older people also tend to spend more time at home, further amplifying the health risks of inadequate housing⁷.

We urge stronger emphasis in the final Plan on supporting cooler, greener and more age-inclusive communities. This means not just tree canopy targets, but investment in accessible cooling infrastructure, such as shaded rest areas, community cooling centres, and early warning systems tailored to the needs of older residents.

COTA SA recommends that the Plan:

- Promote urban greening and increased tree canopy to reduce heat exposure and support wellbeing.
- Encourage thermal-efficient housing and retrofitting programs, especially for older people in rental or low-income households.

Transport and Infrastructure

Reliable transport and digital access are essential to ageing well in regional South Australia. Older people need accessible, affordable ways to get to medical appointments, social activities, shops and services. Through COTA SA's regional engagement, older people consistently report that transport is one of their biggest challenges.

The *Eyre and Western Regional Plan* acknowledges that “The use of public transport in the Eyre and Western region is low” (p. 35). COTA SA supports this acknowledgement and urges stronger emphasis on accessible public and community transport, as well as infrastructure to support a growing mobile care workforce. As more older people remain living at home, the demand for in-home and outreach health services will increase, and so too will the infrastructure required to support these workers.

COTA SA welcomes the planned NBN upgrades aimed at improving connectedness and digital capabilities across the region (p. 37). However, these upgrades alone do not fully address the digital divide experienced by older people⁸. Digital inclusion is not just about infrastructure, it also requires targeted programs to build confidence, skills and access to affordable technology.

⁷ [Soebarto V, Bennetts H, Arakawa Martins L, van Hoof J, Visvanathan R, Hansen A, Pisaniello D, Williamson T, Zuo J. 2021. Thermal comfort at home: A guide for older South Australians. The University of Adelaide](#)

⁸ [Australian Digital Inclusion Index, Key findings and next steps](#)

According to the Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII), regional South Australia scores significantly lower than metropolitan areas, and older people are among the most digitally excluded⁹.

A study by South Australian Council of Social Service (SACOSS) highlighted the critical role that libraries and community centers in regional communities play in providing digital devices and support to community members¹⁰. This ranges from providing wi-fi, printers, help to access online Government services and helping to troubleshoot mobile phone problems, perform device upgrades and resets. The research also found that these community facilities were under-resourced, and experienced increased demand as face-to-face services and shopfronts, including banks and post office branches, closed in country areas. For older people in regional areas, access to technology and devices and understanding of their use is fundamental to digital inclusion. Without action, these gaps will continue to limit access to telehealth, online banking, government services and connection with family and community.

COTA SA recommends that the Plan:

- Invest in accessible and flexible transport solutions, including public, community and active transport, and infrastructure to support a growing mobile care workforce.
- Improve digital inclusion in regional areas through infrastructure investment and structured programs to support older people with skills, confidence and affordable access.
- Coordinate health and social infrastructure planning to meet rising demand and enable older people to access care and support within their communities.

In closing and for future discussion

COTA SA appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Eyre and Western Regional Plan and supports its ambition to shape a region that is sustainable, liveable and future-focused. We welcome the opportunity to work with the State Planning Commission and regional stakeholders to ensure that the final Plan supports older people to live well and age in place. Please contact Chief Executive Miranda Starke in the first instance for further discussion.

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.

⁹ [SACOSS, Digital Inclusion in Regional SA](#)

¹⁰ [SACOSS, Regional South Australians being left behind in digital divide](#)