

SUBMISSION TO THE

Far North 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 Far North 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 more than 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 Far North 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 in the Far North region.

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

Housing Supply and Diversity

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 *Far North Regional Plan's* recognition of the need to increase housing supply and diversify housing types in response to demographic and economic changes (pp. 13–15). We are particularly pleased to see acknowledgments of greater housing choices required to meet the need of older people. It rightly recognises that housing diversity is key to meeting evolving needs. Beyond social housing, COTA SA advocates for a broader mix of housing options that reflect the diversity of older people's preferences. This includes universal design, co-housing, Build-to-Rent (B2R) and retirement living that support downsizing while maintaining community connection and autonomy.

We welcome the Plan's mention of social housing (p. 14) but note that no detail is provided about the scale, location, or suitability of this housing for older people. This is concerning, as older renters, especially single women on low incomes are among the fastest-growing cohorts at risk of housing insecurity. Despite repeated calls from advocates, including COTA SA, for a consistent commitment to social housing in government and Renewal SA developments, delivery remains inconsistent. As SACOSS has identified, South Australia requires at least 1,000 new social housing dwellings annually simply to rebuild the current stock³.

COTA SA recommends that the Plan:

- Commit to measurable targets for social and affordable housing to ensure older renters and low-income households are not left behind.
- Support a mix of accessible and age-inclusive housing models, including smaller homes, co-housing, B2R, retirement living and supported accommodation, ensuring older people can choose housing that reflects their preferences, circumstances and needs.

Productive Economy – Health and Aged Care Services

Access to health and aged care is a critical issue for older people living in the Far North. 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.

² [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Older Australians, Housing and living arrangements*, July 2024](#)

³ [SACOSS, *Policy Brief: Public Housing*, February 2022](#)

Older Australians account for 42% of hospital admissions and 49% of patient bed days nationally⁴. Yet those in regional and remote areas are least likely to access the services they need to age well in place.

COTA SA welcomes investment in projects like the new Royal Flying Doctor Service health and research centre in Port Augusta (p. 21). Infrastructure of this kind, especially when paired with digital health tools and mobile outreach can significantly improve access for older people in remote and rural areas.

COTA SA recognises that employment lands in the Far North 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, particularly in townships like Port Augusta, Roxby Downs and Coober Pedy. 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 Far North. 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 action⁵.

The *Far North Regional Plan* acknowledges that the region will face increased temperatures, fire risk and extreme weather (pp. 27–29). It also outlines welcome steps like supporting tree planting and urban greening to reduce heat exposure (p. 30).

⁴ [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Public hospital admissions growing faster than private, May 2019](#)

⁵ [COTA SA, Climate Change Statement of Interest](#)

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 Far North 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 housing⁶.

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:

- Integrate age-inclusive climate resilience measures, including cool/warm refuges, targeted communication strategies, and accessible emergency planning.
- 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 – Mobility and Digital Inclusion

Reliable transport is essential to ageing well in regional South Australia. Older people need accessible and affordable ways to reach health care, shops, services and social activities. Transport remains one of the most significant barriers to ageing well in regional Australia—particularly in remote or low-density areas where public or community services are limited or non-existent. Nationally, around one in three older Australians face transport challenges, limiting their ability to access essential services and maintain social connections⁷. Through COTA SA’s ongoing engagement with older South Australians, we consistently hear that regional and remote transport limitations severely impact people’s independence, health access and quality of life—particularly for those who no longer drive or live outside major townships.

The *Far North Regional Plan* recognises the challenges of vast distances, dispersed settlements, and a reliance on private vehicles (p. 33). It also calls for better connectivity between towns and improved liveability. COTA SA supports this direction and emphasises that future transport solutions—including on-demand, flexible and community-led models—must be designed with older people in mind.

⁶ [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](#)

⁷ [The Senior, Medically unfit to drive? Poor transport options leave seniors stranded, January 2024](#)

The plan acknowledges that “advancing telecommunications connectivity and access is a key priority for the region” (p. 38). Although we welcome this it does not fully address the digital divide faced by older people⁸. Digital inclusion is not just about infrastructure—it also requires programs to build confidence, skills and access to affordable technology. 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. 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 options, including public, community and active transport, to meet the needs of older people in regional and remote areas.
- Improve digital inclusion in regional areas through infrastructure investment and structured programs to support older people with skills, confidence and affordable access.
- Align transport and digital infrastructure planning with health and social services to ensure older people can access care and stay connected in their communities.

In Closing and for Future Discussion

COTA SA appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Far North Regional Plan and supports its ambition to shape a region that is resilient, connected and future focused. COTA SA looks forward to working with the State Planning Commission, the Department for Housing and Urban Development, and local stakeholders to ensure the final Plan supports older people to live well, safely and independently in their communities. 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.

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

⁹ [SACOSS, Regional South Australians being left behind in the digital divide](#)