

COTA SA Submission to Preventive Health SA

Draft Strategic Plan for Preventive Health Action 2026–2034

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Authorised by:

Miranda Starke, Chief Executive

Prepared by:

Allison Russell, Policy and Advocacy Manager

COTA SA

Kaurna Country

Level 1, 85 Hutt Street, Adelaide SA 5000

E: cotasa@cotasa.org.au | P: 08 8232 0422

www.cotasa.org.au

Acknowledgement of Country

COTA SA acknowledges and respects Aboriginal people as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters of South Australia. We honour Aboriginal peoples' continuing connection to Country and recognise that their sovereignty was never ceded. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal people.

Introduction

COTA SA welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft *Strategic Plan for Preventive Health Action 2026–2034*.

We strongly support Preventive Health SA's vision of "**Healthier South Australians across generations.**" It reflects an important recognition that prevention is a lifelong endeavour and that improving population health requires action across every stage of life, and for all ages, including older people.

COTA SA also welcomes the Plan's emphasis on the social determinants of health, health equity, lived experience, co-design, evidence-informed decision making and whole-of-government collaboration. Together, these provide a strong foundation for a preventive health system that is both effective and equitable.

As the peak body representing more than 700,000 South Australians aged over 50, we believe the draft Plan presents an opportunity to further strengthen this vision by embedding an ageing lens throughout the existing objectives and strategies. This is not about creating a separate stream of work for older people. Rather, it is about recognising that people experience preventive health differently as age intersects with other factors such as income, housing, disability, caring responsibilities, culture, geography, digital inclusion and social connection.

Healthy ageing is a preventive health issue

COTA SA strongly supports the Plan's commitment to health equity and its recognition that health outcomes are shaped by the environments in which people are born, grow, live, work and age.

We encourage Preventive Health SA to apply this same thinking to ageing.

Age itself is not a determinant of poor health, nor should ageing be viewed through a deficit lens. Most older South Australians are active contributors to their families, workplaces, communities and the economy. However, as people age, existing inequities can become compounded. Factors such as insecure housing, financial disadvantage, disability, limited transport options, caring responsibilities, digital exclusion and social isolation can interact with ageing to influence health outcomes and access to preventive health opportunities.

Applying an ageing lens across the Plan would strengthen its equity focus while remaining entirely consistent with its existing principles.

Rather than identifying older people simply as another priority population, COTA SA recommends that the Plan explicitly recognises healthy ageing as a cross-cutting consideration across each of the five strategic objectives. This approach acknowledges the diversity of older South Australians and reflects the reality that ageing intersects with many of the communities already recognised within the Plan, including Aboriginal people, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, LGBTI+ communities, regional populations, carers and people experiencing disadvantage.

Realising the vision of "Healthier South Australians across generations"

COTA SA strongly supports the Plan's vision of creating healthier South Australians across generations. To fully realise this ambition, the final Plan should demonstrate how prevention contributes to health and wellbeing throughout the entire life course.

While the draft Plan includes examples of prevention initiatives focused on children, young people and working-age adults, there are relatively few examples that demonstrate how preventive health supports people in later life.

Healthy ageing should be recognised not simply as preventing illness, but as enabling people to adapt and remain physically active, socially connected, independent and engaged within their communities for as long as possible.

Applying an ageing lens across the existing priorities would strengthen areas including:

- brain health and dementia risk reduction
- social connection and reducing loneliness
- physical activity and overweight and obesity management
- pre-frailty, frailty and falls prevention
- ageing in place, particularly within regional communities

These are not separate priorities, but practical examples of how healthy ageing intersects with the social determinants of health already identified within the Plan.

Building on proven preventive health investments

Preventive Health SA has already demonstrated leadership in supporting evidence-based healthy ageing initiatives.

For example **Strength for Life**, which has received long-standing support from Preventive Health SA, demonstrates how preventive health investment can deliver measurable benefits for older South Australians through improved strength, balance, mobility, confidence, independence and social connection, and reduce costs for primary health care.

Importantly, Strength for Life demonstrates that preventive health in later life is not about managing decline. It is about enabling people to remain active, connected and independent, manage chronic conditions, while reducing the risk of falls, frailty, hospitalisation and loss of function.

COTA SA encourages Preventive Health SA to build on successful initiatives such as Strength for Life as examples of how preventive health contributes to healthier ageing across generations.

Measuring success across the life course

COTA SA welcomes the proposed monitoring and evaluation framework and its focus on systems-level change. There is an opportunity to strengthen the framework by incorporating measures that better reflect healthy ageing and participation throughout later life, as well as those targeting younger people.

These measures would complement existing indicators while reinforcing the Plan's commitment to health equity across the life course.

Conclusion

COTA SA believes the draft Strategic Plan provides a strong foundation for preventive health action in South Australia.

Its vision of **Healthier South Australians across generations** is one that we strongly support.

Embedding an ageing lens throughout the Plan would strengthen that vision by ensuring preventive health policy recognises the diversity of older South Australians and the ways in which ageing intersects with other social determinants of health.

By building on proven prevention initiatives such as Strength for Life and recognising healthy ageing as an integral component of prevention across the life course, Preventive Health SA can ensure that its first Strategic Plan genuinely reflects the needs, strengths and contributions of South Australians at every stage of life.

COTA SA looks forward to continuing to work with Preventive Health SA to support healthier South Australians across generations.

For further information, please contact:
Miranda Starke, Chief Executive, COTA SA
cotasa@cotasa.org.au | (08) 8232 0422