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Peak body calls for government to improve regional ageing

A regional ageing strategy is needed to tackle the “distinct disadvantage” facing older people in regional South Australia, according to a new report by COTA SA.

The inaugural *Ageing in Country South Australia* report – by the state's peak advocacy body for over 50s – calls on all levels of government to enable more than 165,000 older people living in regional South Australia to live and age well.

“There is a danger in assuming that people ageing in regional areas do so on the same terms and under the same circumstances as those in metropolitan areas,” said Jane Mussared, COTA SA Chief Executive.

“More than one quarter of South Australians aged over 50 live in regional South Australia, and face unique challenges compared to their metropolitan counterparts.

“We spoke to more than 400 older people across 20 regional townships during our Country Listening Posts tour, about what works, what doesn't, and what matters most to them as they age.

“Older people told us they felt a strong connection with their location and a sense of community, but many were worried about a lack of support as they age.”

Their positive sentiment stands in stark contrast to many of the concerns older people reported to COTA SA, including financial uncertainty, housing issues, limited mobility and transport and healthcare.

“A worrying number of people we spoke to were living in precarious financial circumstances,” Ms Mussared said.

These people include a couple who had lost their entire superannuation and savings in a failed rural business and had to relocate to live in a house owned by their children.

Another couple sold their house for very little money when they retired and relocated to Peterborough as it was one of few places they could afford to live. They do not regret the decision but want to be sure it can continue to support them as they age.

“Many older people living regionally have lost a long-term partner and now face considerable cost pressures having to live on a single income,” Ms Mussared said.

Around 2,500 older person households in country South Australia are experiencing housing stress, where they have to pay more than one third of their incomes for housing, leaving little for other living expenses.

Research indicates that just 3% of rental properties in the state's regions are affordable to single age pensioner households.

Based on feedback from residents, Ms Mussared predicted mobility scooters will become the default mode of transport in regional townships.

"Local public transport is very limited or non-existent and taxi services have ceased completely in some areas," Ms Mussared said.

"Gophers are becoming common-sight in regional communities, however physical barriers, such as unpaved footpaths and stairs without ramps, are limiting their safe use and access to essential services within the towns.

"Many older people who continue to drive cars do so because they feel they have few other options particularly when they do not live close to facilities and services."

The report found that older people in regional South Australia recognised the importance of taking responsibility for their own health and wellbeing as much as possible. There was a preference for high quality services to be available locally as much as possible and local GPs and other services were generally valued.

"However, we heard about some regional hospitals that are apparently underused and understaffed because they didn't offer the services that local residents want or need," Ms Mussared said.

"Because of this, people have to travel hundreds of kilometres to Adelaide for treatment.

"Residents also told us that local GPs are overstretched, and that there are long waits for specialist appointments."

Download or read the *Ageing in Country South Australia* [report](#) on the COTA SA website.

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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