

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
November 2020

## **Employment, housing, health key for over 50s in State Budget**

Act now or face the rapidly rising risk of homelessness and poverty among older people, warns COTA SA, ahead of the State Government's 2020-21 Budget.

Chief Executive of the state's peak advocacy body for over 50s, Jane Mussared, said it was critical the older population was a key focus in this year's Budget.

"There was a real lack of measures and funding to support the ageing well of South Australians last year," she said.

"Employment conditions and housing affordability have worsened, particularly for older women, and must be at the top of the State Government's priorities if we are to realise the stated ambition of this government to support ageing well."

COTA SA's 2020-21 State Budget submission, delivered to the Premier and Ministers, details a range of recommendations under seven key priorities areas:

- 1) Ageism
- 2) Employment
- 3) Housing
- 4) Health
- 5) Transport
- 6) Older country South Australians
- 7) Technology inclusion

Ms Mussared said age discrimination was rife in South Australia, including and especially in workplaces.

"Studies consistently find that one-third of older workers have experienced age discrimination in the past year," she said.

"More than half of female jobseekers are aged over 40, while the median time on JobSeeker (formerly Newstart) for unemployed people between 55 and 64 years old is more than three years.

"JobSeeker is a payment designed to 'fill the gap' but an increasing number of people in their 50s and 60s, especially women, will rely on it as their sole income as their careers come to an end prematurely.

"These people can't get work because they're discriminated based on their age, they are not eligible for a disability pension, and they are too young to retire and receive an aged pension – it's a perfect storm.

“While a job crisis will be very real for South Australians of all ages, the recent Federal Budget announced the JobMaker initiative which, while providing important support for younger jobseekers, will further marginalise older unemployed people.

“COTA SA urges the State Government to step into this breach and offer incentives and training to ensure older workers also have a pathway back to work.”

In its 2020-21 State Budget submission, COTA SA renewed calls for the State Government to tackle age discrimination with a state-based strategy. COTA SA has proposed funding a project that engages with employers and older workers to define the barriers to mature-aged employment and then trials and evaluates practical strategies to improve access.

Ms Mussared said the period of unemployment leading into retirement was growing, compounding the state's housing issues.

“South Australia is also in urgent need of a comprehensive housing strategy, to give older people access to safe, appropriate and affordable housing,” she said.

“In many local government areas, there has been at least a 50 percent increase in the number of people suffering housing stress. The rate of people affected will increase very fast as our population continues to age, and the supply of affordable accommodation diminishes.

“The Federal Budget failed to deliver new social housing infrastructure. The State Government has a chance to achieve a double good - stimulate the economy and jobs while housing people who are otherwise at considerable risk of homelessness.

“We have also urged the government to fund a specialised housing service to assist vulnerable older people in housing stress to secure ongoing and appropriate accommodation. Current services are not targeted to the specialised needs of older [people and have not learned from evidence elsewhere that early intervention is much more cost and time effective.”

Among COTA SA's health recommendations, is that South Australia catch up with the rest of the nation by offering free ambulance travel for Commonwealth Seniors Health Card holders.

“The current system is out of step and we need urgent action to address this inequity and remove the cost barrier that puts people's lives at risk,” Ms Mussared said.

“South Australia is now the only jurisdiction in Australia that does not offer free ambulance travel to people who receive an aged pension. This needs to change urgently.

“The State Government must recognise that ambulance services go well beyond the historic function of taking people to and from hospital and are now an integral part of the public health triage and intervention system.”

Read the full 2020-21 State Budget submission on the COTA SA website:  
<https://www.cotasa.org.au/lib/pdf/policy/state-budget-202021.pdf>

**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.**

---

**For interview requests or more information, please contact:**

Ben Smeaton – [bsmeaton@communicate.net.au](mailto:bsmeaton@communicate.net.au) or 0488 940 010

Bec Tape – [rtape@communicate.net.au](mailto:rtape@communicate.net.au) or 0438 806 983