

25 August 2020

The Hon Stephen Wade MLC
Minister for Health and Wellbeing
GPO Box 2555
ADELAIDE SA 5001

Dear Minister

I am writing on behalf of COTA SA to congratulate you on the release of *South Australia's Plan for Ageing Well 2020-2025* and to provide feedback and advice from COTA SA in terms of the next stages of implementation.

The Plan was considered at the most recent meeting of the COTA SA Policy Council. Our Policy Council is made up of a diverse group of older South Australians and is chaired by COTA SA Vice President, Anne Burgess. The Policy Council had earlier contributed comments in the development of the Plan. This included a suggestion to change the phrase Ageing Well to Living Well. While this suggestion was not accepted, the Plan does make good references to living well. We also commend the very important acknowledgement in the Plan of the diversity of older people challenging our community's habit of seeing older people as homogenous in terms of needs, aspirations and opportunities.

The Plan provides good information (and infographics) about older people and their importance in terms of numbers, contribution and potential for South Australia. We are keen however that it is more than a Strategic Plan for the Office for Ageing Well and becomes the Plan for Ageing Well in SA including across government. We also urge the introduction of measurable outcomes and tracked results to reflect priorities, improve accountability, map trends and understand achievements and shortcomings in addressing ageing well.

More than a quarter of older people live outside metropolitan Adelaide and this proportion will continue to grow. Following our 2019 country listening posts program and as part of our Ageing in Country South Australia Report, we urged the development of a rural ageing strategy. With the out migration of younger people from country areas and the choice by many older South Australians (including through economic necessity) to move to regional areas, this is of growing importance. The Regional Development Institute suggests that the ageing of rural Australia is the most important demographic shift in rural areas of the last 30 years.

We have, including through our budget submission and feedback to the plan's development, urged a focus and priority on employment to support older people to remain in jobs with an opportunity to earn income for as long as they want to. This is especially important in the wake of COVID-19 when it is likely that many people in their 50s and 60s will find it impossible to win jobs and return to paid work. We are very disappointed that the Plan does not address this especially given the demise of DOME in recent months. Prolonged unemployment and poverty in the years before being eligible for an Age Pension will undermine ageing well. Ageism and age discrimination are actively shortening the careers for a third of older people.

We are equally disappointed that there is little concrete action on housing. Access to employment and housing as we age is increasingly gendered and there is an urgent need to increase the supply of affordable, accessible and stable housing. Already estimates are that 9,000 older South Australians are in housing stress with many of those at real risk of homelessness.



The Plan emphasises the importance of community connections and, while this is well referenced, we would like to see more concrete actions and commitments to support it as a priority. The Plan so far lacks tangible actions to combat both social isolation and ageism, including by improving transport and digital connection options. Since April COTA SA volunteers have telephoned well over 1000 South Australians aged in 70s and above without internet and living alone and for many their isolation and loneliness is very real.

The other areas that we would like to see greater emphasis as the Plan is implemented include –

- Reference to the priority placed on climate change by older people – our work indicates that this is an increasingly important issue for older people both for their own sake and as a priority for future generations.
- A better focus on both older CALD and indigenous South Australians – while the reference to an elder abuse campaign for indigenous elders is important, the disadvantage and special place of both groups is unacknowledged.
- A much stronger profile of the value of physical activity as we age, particularly given the great reach of Strength for Life which is supported by SA Health and growing in penetration and potential.
- Stepping out initiatives that will increase the uptake and use of Advanced Care Directives and other end of life support, noting the new investment by SA Health to community palliative care and the Attorney General's review of Power of Attorney legislation. Reference to exploring whether voluntary assisted dying is supported and if so, how, was also missing.
- We would like to have seen reference to the part the state plays in aged care including in anticipation of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety findings and on the back of the effective work between health and aged care to prepare for COVID-19 outcomes.
- Reference to oral health is missing but we hope it will be considered as part of the promised health policy for older people to be developed over the next year.

Minister, the COTA SA community congratulates you and your Government for your leadership to date through COVID-19 including and especially for older people. We welcome the Plan with its description of ageing in SA and focus on ageing well. We look forward to the next stage of implementation to create a comprehensive blueprint to put ageing well within the sights of all South Australians. We offer our assistance to develop concrete targets and strategies for this next stage.

Yours sincerely

Jane Mussared
Chief Executive