

## SUBMISSION in response to South Australian Draft Walking Strategy - YourSAy

### Prepared and authorised by:

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### Who is COTA SA?

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 630,000 older South Australians. COTA SA reflects the diversity of modern ageing in terms of living arrangements, relationships, income, sexuality, culture, health, geography and aspirations. COTA SA connects with thousands of older people each year throughout SA. Our policy and advocacy are guided by the COTA SA Policy Council made up of older South Australians from a diverse range of backgrounds, along with a number of advisory groups. COTA SA's social enterprise, The Plug-in undertakes regular surveys with older South Australians in addition to its work facilitating access to older people for organisations, researchers and service providers. COTA SA is part of the COTA Federation with independent COTAs in each state and territory along with COTA Australia.

### 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.*

## INTRODUCTION

COTA SA welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Draft South Australian Walking Strategy 2022-2032.

Our submission includes input provided in response to a call out about the draft Strategy from our staff, the COTA SA Policy Council and our advisory groups.

We commend the focus on walking. Walking has enormous utility and considerable potential as an enabler of ageing well, and is widely accessible and affordable.

The draft walking strategy is fresh and comprehensive. Given the extensive involvement of the Heart Foundation with walking over many years and their knowledge and expertise in the 'walking movement', COTA SA particularly respects the partnership approach used by Wellbeing SA to develop the draft.

The draft is an excellent first step in the State Government embracing a proactive role in getting more people to walk more often and for more purposes. We applaud the overarching sentiment of 'all ages and all abilities'.

We offer the following specific feedback.

## PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The draft Walking Strategy rightly identifies integrated public transport as part of supporting opportunities for walking. A critical consideration for people with limited mobility (many of whom will be older people) will be to ensure that the distances people must walk between home, public transport and destination is not extended. Indeed in some instances it needs to be reduced.

Access to accessible, reliable, safe, affordable and regular public transport is fundamental to ageing well because it enables people who do not drive to continue to get out and about in their community. Research undertaken in 2016 about the use of the South Australia Seniors Card for public transport in metropolitan Adelaide indicates that access to public transport is "critical for seniors' wellbeing".<sup>1</sup>

In changes proposed (and abandoned) to public transport routes and stops in 2020, a critical issue for older people was that the distance threshold that would need to be walked to and between stops was increased up to 800 metres. Far from acting as an encouragement for walking, this created a very real risk of preventing people who can walk only short distances from being able to use public transport in the future. We continue to get feedback about the unrealistic walking distances between public transport stops for both the Royal Adelaide Hospital and the SA Dental Hospital for example for older people coming from the suburbs.

COTA SA believes an important part of an effective Walking Strategy will be to increase the use of public transport for all citizens. This should include addressing barriers to use identified by older people such as the digitisation of timetables, ticketing and information, safety concerns, reducing the number of bus stops and removing printed timetables at bus stops.

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<sup>1</sup> Helen Feist, The University of Adelaide, January 2016

## **CLIMATE CHANGE**

Our surveying indicates there is considerable concern among older South Australians about climate change. We recommend that the document should explicitly mention climate change and the impact of climate change on walking. We support the many references to the importance of shade along walking routes. The extension and maintenance of tree canopy through planning codes will be increasingly important in supporting walking both on designated walking routes and around towns and cities.

## **DESIGN – SEATING, INFRASTRUCTURE**

A lot of the walking undertaken by older South Australians is in close proximity to their homes and thus the design of towns and cities is just as important as that of designated walking paths.

We support reference to the importance of seating and safe road crossing options. Enabling people an opportunity to rest in a shaded and green space in their local area, accessible by walking from nearby streets, is as important as formal walking trails.

Much of the infrastructure (footpaths, kerbing etc) that supports walking in towns and cities relies upon local council priority. We note that the strategy can only ‘encourage’ local councils to be part of it. It would be good to see councils ‘sign-on’ to developing walking policies. More definitive programs for funding may help attract the interest of local councils.

Also mentioned in the draft are the aims of promoting walking, public transport and use of parks. Making this combination easily searchable would be helpful and involve bringing together information from across agencies where information already exists but often in an unlinked way - e.g. the Burnside Historical Society Walking tours have downloadable pdf files and some Google linked maps but this is not discoverable via the Walking SA website. Digital access will be out of reach for significant numbers of people and thus hard copy walking maps should also be available from libraries, local council offices and community centres.

We continue to get feedback about the issues for pedestrians on walkways shared with bicycles. The strategy should address the future of this shared use and actions to address the difficulties encountered by walkers.

We also hear about the barriers to walkability in suburbs that must navigate around major roads. A very good and often cited example is Cross Road and the very real barrier it creates between Urrbrae and Myrtle Bank for example creating what is effectively a “moat” between adjacent neighbourhoods.

## **WALKING GROUP INFRASTRUCTURE**

We commend various initiatives and groups that enable people to join others to walk socially. The Heart Foundation Walking Groups, particularly as they continue to support diverse access, are an important part of that infrastructure.

Mall walking too is a very important option and plays a central part in the active lives of many older people. Mall walking groups in centres such as the Westfield shopping centres are all weather and for many people feel safe, sociable, and work well with local retail proprietors.

## CONSIDERATION OF ALL ABILITY

The focus on walking for people of all ability levels is important. We note the acknowledgement on p11 "Our walking networks need to be planned to be accessible to everyone, including families with strollers, seniors, people who move with a wheelchair or walking frame, as well as those who walk and run for recreation and sport."

While physical accessibility such as is enabled by smooth and wide paths and kerb ramps is part of this, we would like to see more focus on options for walking for those who will only manage short distances. There are few specific references to the different needs across ability levels.

While expressing an all abilities sentiment, the strategy emphasises those people who do more robust and vigorous walking with little emphasis on the short walk.

## FOCUS ON REGIONAL SA

Attention needs to be given to how the vision and priorities relate to regional South Australia. The reality is that if it is not addressed in the strategy it will not be in the Action Plan.

26% of older South Australians (more than 165,000 people) live outside metropolitan Adelaide. Having good local walking policies and facilities is just as relevant to ageing well and health, wellbeing and social connections for the older people living in country areas.

The strategy does not address the needs and opportunities for those living in country areas. References to built environments, urban environments, integrated public transport, and direct paths to stops and stations will support metropolitan based walking. We would like to see a similar emphasis on the explicit and detailed address of rural walking infrastructure needs for rural South Australians in their everyday lives. More regional examples would be a useful start, for example on page 12 under 2.3 'Reinvigorate our main streets and local neighbourhoods' some regional examples in the list would underline that it is a statewide strategy.

Primary Industry and Regions SA (PIRSA) is an important stakeholder and should be included in the government agencies involved in the strategy and actions.

## IMAGERY, DATA AND CONTEXT

The data and format of presentation beginning on page 6 is neither self-explanatory nor terribly helpful. The "benefits of walking" graphic for example is not at all obvious or compelling and in some instances (for example safety) could be argued to have the opposite impact. Equally it is not at all clear in the "Benefits per kilometres walked" graph to whom the benefit accrues and therefore the dollar value makes no sense.

We would like to have seen acknowledgement of other key stakeholders in a Walking Strategy on p8. Three relevant additional draft strategies need to be referenced – the Regional Development Strategy, the proposed Digital Inclusion Strategy and the Road Safety Strategy consultation draft.

We encourage a wider range of images to be used to underline that it is a strategy about all abilities and people on a statewide basis. The front cover includes two important cohorts - First Nations walkers in a regional area and a young family in an urban area. More images -

genuinely reflecting the sentiment of *all ages, all abilities* - would speak better to the inclusive aspirations of the draft.

### **IMPLEMENTATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

We support the opportunity in Priority 3.1. to educate, market and promote walking. The reference to "increase awareness of walking across the state, specifically the different types of walking and the numerous benefits associated with any increase of walking at the individual and population level" is an important strategy and we look forward to the Action Plan to understand what it will actually mean.

The Strategy scopes out a huge amount of work to be undertaken on a cross-agency basis. Resources dedicated to keep the strategy in the focus of the various organisations with parts to play in implementation will be required. We note on p9 that a 3-year Action Plan will be developed and overseen by Wellbeing SA and progress reported on a regular basis. Progress reporting must be public. Without a driver and regular accountability, the strategy will not have the impact that it should.