

MEDIA RELEASE

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Labor's Budget Reply commitment on cancer welcome but missing in action on other key commitments for 8 million older Australians

Older Australians will welcome funding for cancer treatment and medicine, and for a modest extra commitment to more aged care training places; but they will be deeply disappointed at the lack of commitments by Labor to provide any additional home care packages for 125,000 older Australians in desperate need of support, and for those in desperate need of dental treatment, COTA Australia said today.

COTA Chief Executive Ian Yates said Labor's announcement in the Budget Reply that it will provide \$2.3 billion to cover out of pocket costs for cancer treatment will alleviate significant health costs for older Australians fighting various cancers and is welcome.

Mr Yates said support for older workers to retrain through Advanced Adult Apprenticeships for aged care and NDIS was also welcome news for older workers experiencing both ageism in the workforce, the loss of many traditional industries and the need to re-skill as workforce needs change.

However, Mr Yates said there were the same gaping holes in Labor's Budget Reply as there were in the Government's Budget on Tuesday, including:

- no new Home Care packages for 125,000 older Australians consigned to up to 22 months wait for high level packages, many suffering from dementia, which Labor seems to have ignored;
- no increase in Newstart for over 350,000 mature aged unemployed (see our separate media release);
- no oral and dental health program for older people losing their teeth, nutrition and independence; and
- no proactive Retirement Incomes Review, which is desperately needed to future-proof our retirement income system, as the Parliamentary Budget Office has demonstrated.

"These are all matters we have put to government and opposition repeatedly over the last year and we are deeply disappointed that these key issues for older Australians appear not to be a priority for the Opposition, in the same way as they have fallen off the government's agenda," said Mr Yates.

"While we applaud Labor for recognising the need for more aged care training places in TAFE, it has not committed to providing relief for more than 125,000 people waiting for home care packages, despite the Opposition's constant criticisms of the government on this issue," Mr Yates said.

"Counsel assisting the Aged Care Royal Commission described the home care waitlist as 'cruel, unfair, disrespectful and discriminatory against older Australians', in response to COTA's testimony at the Royal Commission. We agree."

“COTA has called on both Parties to immediately commit \$1.25 billion per annum to halve the number of older Australians waiting for more than three months for home care they desperately need, and to commit to increasing that to \$2.5 billion p.a. over the next term of government to bring the maximum waiting list to three months. COTA will keep pushing for that commitment from all Parties ahead of the election in May.”

“Older Australians living with cancer will be saved out of pocket costs for cancer treatment, but too many of those with cancer and also assessed as requiring a Home Care Package will likely die before they receive it,” Mr Yates said.

“It’s time to shift the goal posts and give older Australians the care and support they need – not to die in the corridors of hospital emergency departments because they could not get care at home.”

COTA’s State of the Older Nation Report also shows that 49% of older Australians are experiencing at least one vulnerability factor – including living on an income of less than \$30,000.

“Setting up intergenerational competition as Labor appeared to do in the Budget Reply is unhelpful and unfair to the many older Australians who are struggling with financial insecurity and increasing costs as they age,” Mr Yates said.

“As well as increasing Newstart by at least \$75 a week we need to see a commitment to a full retirement incomes review, recommended by COTA, the Productivity Commission, the Grattan Institute and many others, that will make sure whoever is in government after the election creates equitable and fair policies across taxation, superannuation, the age pension, and housing – so that the Age Pensioners who built this country receive a fair treatment by government.”

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