

MEDIA RELEASE

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Action on aged care, health, retirement income and employment is central to older Australians needs and rights says Council on the Ageing's Pre-Budget Submission

Australia's leading advocate for older people, Council on the Ageing (COTA) Australia, is calling for greater choice, simplicity and more meaningful support for older people in its 2020 Pre-Budget Submission to the Federal Government ahead of a formative year for the future of older Australians.

Reform in health, aged care, and employment sectors are among COTA's Budget priorities as several prominent commissions and reviews are shedding light on the many tens of thousands of older Australians still being left behind.

COTA Chief Executive Ian Yates said the 2020/21 Budget must allocate significant funding to ensure older Australians have equitable access to health, aged care, and income support that meets their specific needs and honours their human rights.

"The important reforms we hope to see from the Royal Commission into Aged Care will be crucial to the wellbeing and dignity of all Australians," said Mr Yates. "We have submitted that significant funding must be allocated both to continue current reform initiatives and expedite urgent matters, including the reduction of home care package wait times to 60 days or less.

"The Government must respond by creating comprehensive, easily accessible information, assessment and case management services and programs to empower older Australians and provide the information they need to make and achieve their choices about their care and support. This Budget should in particular include the implementation of an aged care navigation system and the abolition of the current Aged Care Approvals Round allocation process.

"This Budget must also properly fund consumer consultations in the Retirement Incomes Review. COTA is also calling for the establishment of an independent body to advise the Government on any changes to retirement incomes to ensure carefully built retirement plans do not go to waste.

"Older Australians are still missing out on essential health services like dental care because they cannot access treatment as it's currently being delivered. Our submission includes the rollout of a mobile oral health program and increasing Federal funding for oral health schemes, ensuring delivery prioritises vulnerable cohorts.

"Mature age employment is another issue the Budget must urgently address. Older Australians face blatant discrimination from employers while still below the retirement age, while many wish to continue work beyond that age. Older Australians require specialist jobseeker agencies for mature age jobseekers that can help them use their existing experience and attain new skillsets to pair them with appropriate work. COTA has recommended changes to the Age Discrimination Act for stronger action against discrimination and to clarify employers' rights to encourage mature age applicants.

"We have also reiterated our call for raising the Newstart rate by at least \$75 per week to help the hundreds of thousands of jobseekers, including a great many older Australians, who live below the poverty line while locked out of the workforce.

"I look forward to continuing to consult closely with the Government on these issues. This submission outlines how we can make this Budget as an opportunity to ensure a fair go for all Australians."

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A selection of policy priorities in COTA's Pre-Budget Submission is below.

Health

- Increase Federal funding for public dental services to reduce wait times for vulnerable people and tie delivery of services to priority cohorts including older Australians
- Fund a trial of mobile dental services to improve access for older Australians, especially those in residential aged care
- Invest in preventative health programs targeted at older Australians

Aged Care

- Continue implementing reforms which government has previously announced, and/or recommended by previous inquiries, without waiting on the Royal Commission, with particular emphasis on:
 1. Urgently reducing home care package wait times to 60 days or less within 2-3 years
 2. Give older Australians control over their residential care funding and remove the restraint of the Aged Care Approvals Round restriction on allocation of places
 3. Increase numbers and training of aged care staff and encourage a consumer-centric sector culture
- Allocate funds to immediately implement Royal Commission Final Report recommendations.
- Implement an Aged Care Navigation system.

Treasury

- Fund consumer consultations in the Retirement Incomes Review about policy design and impact
- Establish an independent body to advise Government on retirement incomes and provide impact modelling for consideration in policy changes

Skills and employment

- Incentivise the retention of mature age employees, potentially with an ongoing tax reduction
- Develop specialist jobseeker agencies with specific skills and training in the needs of older workers
- Publish data on successful mature-age applicants to Australian Public Service positions
- Develop new initiatives to combat ageism and address the underemployment of older Australians

Social Services

- Raise Newstart rate by at least \$75 per week for all recipients, and implement indexing and benchmarking similar to the Age Pension
- Abolish the Liquid Asset Waiting Period for older Australians
- Raise maximum Commonwealth Rental Assistance by 40% for singles
- Include older Australians with disability in the National Disability Strategy 2020

Attorney General's Department

- Amend the Age Discrimination Act to strengthen capacity to prosecute systemic discrimination, and to clarify that employers may explicitly encourage mature age applicants.

The full submission can be found at: <https://www.cota.org.au/information/resources/submission/pre-budget-submission-budget-2020-21/>