

**COTA (Tas)**

*Council On The Ageing*

Council on the Ageing (Tas) Inc

Submission to  
Tasmanian Government Community Consultation  
2011-12 State Budget

# A Word to the Wise

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Valuing Older Tasmanians*

1. That the Government take the initiative in establishing a scheme to identify suitable individuals to be accorded the honourable status of *Community Elders*.
2. That the Government create a *Minister for Older Tasmanians*, to provide the necessary leadership and direction in relation to emerging trends, improve opportunities for older people to influence policy and be an advocate for older people across all levels of government.

### *Communication*

3. That the government establish a trial program that employs older people as specialist 'communicators'. This initiative reflects an active sustainable cost effective model to disseminate information about a range of lifestyle and essential needs.
4. That the Government assign priority to (a) ensuring equitable access to digital services for people in rural areas, and (b) delivering education and training in relation to the uses and application of digital services to people in rural areas.

### *Participation*

5. That the government produce a guide on how to tackle loneliness and social isolation and facilitate the development of intergenerational projects.
6. That research be undertaken to examine participation by older people in tertiary education so as to inform planning and underpin inclusion policies.
7. That the government, as a matter of urgency, take steps to (a) address the lack of adult education provision in rural areas, (b) adopt measures to facilitate the growth of the U3A concept outside southern urban centres, (c) review fee concessions and payment arrangements to make participation more affordable for older people, and (e) review the access by older Tasmanians to Adult Education programs across the State.

### *Mobility*

8. That the government establish a Rural Transport Unit to focus specifically on travel and mobility issues from the viewpoint of rural people. The Unit should be based in a rural centre such as Campbell Town or Oatlands and include an ongoing position specifically designated to focus on mobility issues for older Tasmanians living in rural areas.
9. That the government institute free public transport during non peak hours on Metro services for people over the age of 70 and explore means of extending this to people in areas not serviced by Metro through subsidies and agreements with private operators.

10. That the government conduct a review of all areas of fees and charges (such as driving licence fees) as they relate to people over the age of 70 and apply administrative saving to introduce additional exemptions or rebates.

### *Lifestyle*

11. That the government develops a promotion strategy which aims to establish Tasmania as the best part of Australia in which to retire. This should be accompanied by a qualitative study amongst recent older immigrants in particular and older people more generally to obtain some assessment of how good growing old in Tasmania is and what needs to be improved.
12. That the government provide funding to re-institute the Living Longer Living Stronger Program in Tasmania on an ongoing basis and extend it State-wide.

### *Security of Place*

13. That the government amend anti-discrimination and workers compensation legislation to remove provisions that make it possible to discriminate against people on the basis of age, and reference a thorough review of other legislation that might have a similar effect.
14. That the government fund surveys to identify community safety issues that are important to older people and help develop mechanisms with police and local government throughout the State to follow up on concerns.

### *The Cost of Living*

15. That the government establish a Research Round Table to develop research partnerships between government, research establishments, and other sectors, to provide a forum for discussion of strategic issues relevant to the trends, opportunities and challenges of an older Tasmanian population.
16. That the Government provide funding to COTA (Tas) for a project officer to develop and coordinate information in relation to increasing energy costs and cost of living specifically for older people to better understand their energy consumption and energy efficiency.

## INTRODUCTION

The way we see the world and how we interact with people is heavily influenced by the way of life that we experience in our earliest years.

*People who are turning 80 this year* are people who grew up when there were no televisions, no computers and no mobile phones. The first thirty years of their lives was characterised by close interaction with family and community members, and knowledge of world history and affairs gleaned from books, magazines and newspapers. The big technologies of the time were electricity, the telephone and the radio, and many who lived outside the main urban centres had limited access to even them. People turning 80 this year grew up when the world was at war and most will have been touched in some way by the experience of active service.

*People who are turning 60 this year* (born 1950) grew up in a world that was changing, that contrasted post-war optimism with the ever-present threat of global annihilation. The catchcry of their youth was “never trust anyone over thirty”. The values of this generation revolve around issues of personal freedom, prosperity, ownership and personal development. Because they grew up with change, they adapt more readily than their parents to new technology.

*People who are turning 40 this year* (born 1970) have never known a world without television. They learned independence early in life, are highly productive and place autonomy, recognition and time management high on the agenda.

In regard to the technology of everyday life, the generation gap has never been greater. In regard to the needs of modern society, there is no greater need than to bring the generations closer together.

From the point of view of older people, the world of the old is forever governed by the young. There are few people in Parliament over the age of 60. The current crop of MHAs is well below this.

Even with the abolition of compulsory retirement, apart from the odd magistrate, there are very few people over the age of 65 employed by government, although there is a range of situations where it would be perfectly rational to do so.

In regard to separation, the gap between city and country has never been greater. In regard to the needs of older people, it has never been more important for the differences and difficulties to be understood.

A higher proportion of the rural and remote population is older than is the case for cities. The reform of funding and planning is critical for rural services. Small communities require flexible solutions that are responsive to the community.

It's a question of outlook. At the level of government and the public sector, the development of policies in relation to issues for older people and the framing of decisions are largely done by people who see the world through the windows of middle age. Policies and decisions affecting people living in country areas are made by people who see and experience the world through city eyes.

The matters raised in this submission reflect the point of view of older people. The recommendations arise directly from the way in which older people see and experience the world.

## VALUING OLDER TASMANIANS

*We need to build a culture of greater respect for our older people!*

Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1931) imagined a horrific utopian world in which nobody lived past the age of sixty. In a similar vein, *Logan's Run*, (1967) by William F Nolan and George C Johnson, was set in a world where people were exterminated when they reached the age of 21.

But what would really happen if a world evolved where no one grows older and wiser?

It is common to encounter those that view 'seniors' as a burden on society, especially in relation to health and support needs. They may be perceived to be 'living in the past', 'out of touch with modern society' and 'past their use by date'. There is an urgent need to change these perceptions.

The beginning of this lies in recognising and appreciating the value of the wisdom, opinions, experience and the contribution made by older people.

In the 'economic' sphere, businesses often dump older workers in favour of 'experts' in some new technology, suggesting that employers value technical skills above acquired knowledge and experience. But the lack of 'domain knowledge' can lead to delays in finding solutions or in planning. Replacing the store of knowledge that is lost when an older workers retires, resigns or is made redundant can present serious challenges, reduce efficiency and increase costs.

The same is true in the public sphere. Redundancy programs designed to reduce the size of the public service always contain an 'opportunity cost' as the sum of all the knowledge available is also reduced.

The challenge of harnessing knowledge as an organisational resource takes on a more urgent note in the age of the Internet. Treating knowledge as a valuable corporate resource requires another mindset, another organisational culture and structure; a mindset that recognises that it is the brains of its employees that constitute the real capital of any enterprise.

In the 'social' sphere, older people are better equipped than younger people to solve conflicts. They can more easily see multiple points of view, are more interested in searching for compromise and more willing to acknowledge that there might be things they don't know. In any circumstance of challenge or conflict, as long as 'experience' is present, it is less likely that past mistakes will be repeated. In general, young people may be 'intelligent' and clever, but older people are more likely to be wise.

There are presently more than 100,000 Tasmanians with more than 60 years of life experience behind them. This translates to around **7.5 million person-years** of acquired knowledge. Tasmania has the oldest population of all the States.

So how can the Tasmanian community appropriately access the vast array of skills, knowledge and wisdom that is 'stored' in our older people?

To begin with, it may be instructive to look at the way that indigenous people, Japanese, Chinese and other Asian cultures understand their '*Elders*'.

Elders are members of their community that are entitled to a particular quality of respect. The most important reason is that they are teachers and role models for the people around them. They are acknowledged as Elders by their people because of a lifetime accumulation of cultural and traditional knowledge and wisdom.

An Elder is sometimes a person who experiences personal traumas and emerges from them as a good and respectable person, at peace with themselves, able to forgive, able to be happy. If he or she learns to control anger and violence, or otherwise overcome the traumas he or she experienced in early life, and, most importantly, is able to teach others to do the same, then he or she is likely to be regarded as an Elder.

Such people become valuable to their community as role-models. They are admired for their perseverance, their strength of will, their fortitude, and for other qualities that are seen as necessary for the healing process. Their presence alone shows others that healing is possible. The honouring of role-models is a powerful value for many people: and of all role-models, the Elders are the most esteemed.

There is simply nothing in Western society that corresponds neatly or closely to the idea of an Elder. The idea of a community-acknowledged Elder, and the respect due to Elders, may be something that could be learnt from the wider world view and applied to the present.

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** That the Government take the initiative in establishing a scheme to identify suitable individuals to be accorded the honourable status of *Community Elders*.

One objective of the scheme would be that eventually every town and neighbourhood would have its own select group of Elders acknowledged and selected locally by the people of that community. While their role would largely be to symbolically represent the esteem in which all older people are held, a network of local Elders could be very useful to local authorities, as would a State-wide network to the State Government.

It can be expected that Elders would become a source of community cohesion, as well as being a living repository of community history. Far from being ‘past their use by date’, society would be able to make far better use of their skills and knowledge. From this would grow many new ways in which Elders and older people in general, can ‘value add’ to the work of younger generations, e.g. sharing information and experience about growing, cooking and securing food.

The creation of Elders would send a powerful message to all that the Tasmanian community genuinely values and respects people beyond the end of their former working life.

Most importantly, it would address the other side of the conversation around ‘positive ageing’ by tackling the attitudes issue head on. It would establish a ‘brand’ for older Tasmanians that would attract affirmation.

The proposal is consistent with the Tasmania Together Goal #5, which seeks to achieve ‘*vibrant, inclusive and growing communities where people feel valued and connected*’. It is particularly relevant when tested against Benchmarks 1 & 3.

It is envisaged that the Elders Scheme would require some initial investment of time and effort from within Government, to establish a suitable framework and infrastructure but that it would eventually attract sufficient private sector support to make it sustainable in the longer term.

*Estimated impact on Forward Estimates:* Resources invested would support employing a project officer to develop the project and assist local government and their communities to embrace the concept.

|                          | <b>2011-12</b> | <b>2012-13</b> | <b>2013-14</b> | <b>2014-15</b> |
|--------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Tasmanian Elders Program | \$250,000      | \$280,000      | \$120,000      | -              |

The Tasmanian Government can provide leadership in addressing issues of negative attitudes towards older people in a range of other ways.

The latest available figures indicate that people over 60 years of age represent almost 22% of the Tasmanian population; more than children under 16. Projections suggest that the proportion will rise above 25% within a decade.

Responsibility for dealing with matters of policy in relation to older people and the management of selected programs lies with the ‘Seniors Bureau’ in the Department of Premier & Cabinet. In terms of line management, it is co-located with a number of other offices dealing with the interests of minority groups.

COTA (Tas) is of the view that the interests of almost a quarter of the population warrant something greater than minority status. Given the need for a ‘whole of government’ approach and the certainty that issues concerning older people are bound to become more prominent in the years to come, it is felt that portfolio status may be more appropriate.

There are important defects in the existing policy and planning structures dealing with the needs and aspirations of older Tasmanians. There are damaging and inefficient disconnects between service systems, policy makers, research institutions and community organisations in relation to the interests of older Tasmanians.

The health, housing, transport, community care and other needs of this growing population can only be addressed if the Tasmanian government engages in a concerted research, consultation and planning exercise that extend far beyond the urban planning and social policy frameworks currently in existence.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** That the Government create a *Minister for Older Tasmanians*, to provide the necessary leadership and direction in relation to emerging trends, improve opportunities for older people to influence policy and be an advocate for older people across all levels of government. It would also fulfil a symbolic role and provide a more prominent ‘platform’ from which positive ageing strategies and actions could be better promoted.

COTA expects that the creation of the ministry would be achieved initially by the reallocation of existing roles and responsibilities of the Seniors Bureau, and that the impact on forward estimates would be minimal.

*Note: Seniors Week*

*While COTA (Tas) endorses the work done to develop a program of local activities and involvements for older people in the community, the term ‘Seniors Week’ is potentially laden with neutral or negative values. It implies that activities are for seniors only and has lead to many events that discourage participation by non-Seniors.*

*A comparable program elsewhere is called the “Full of Life Festival” and actively encourages intergenerational and multicultural activities. This name opens the mind to far more possibilities than have emerged in the current program.*

## COMMUNICATION

*Let the old talk to the old.*

*The development, design and delivery of information for older people should be done with the active involvement of older people.*

Access to information about programs and services is one of the most common issues that are raised in discussions with older people. There are still too many situations in which people remain ignorant of what is available.



Modes of communication have changed dramatically in recent years. People in today's workforce require a high degree of technological literacy. The demands of everyday working life apply a constant pressure to update knowledge of new media of communication.

Retirement from the workforce often removes a major motivation to learn new things. Some will continue to be motivated by personal interest and a customary state of personal development and growth. For many, the loss of work motivation will leave them essentially 'frozen' in time; ceasing work means they cease to update their knowledge.

This presents some very real challenges for the way in which older people become 'informed' about programs, activities and services that are relevant to their needs and interests. The effectiveness of generic messages and communication channels is limited amongst a community for whom those messages and channels are not generic.

The advances in the quality and design of government websites has dramatically improved their amenity. It has enhanced access to both general and specific information about many government programs and services, provided better means of collecting information from the public and some new ways of communicating. The picture is mixed; some sites remain too static and content is poor.

While government sites are backed by a significant investment in IT development and maintenance, sites operated by not-for-profit community organisations are rarely well resourced. There is a need to explore ways to improve the way in which information is presented by these groups, by providing financial or technical support.

It has become pervasive in broadcast media for messages to include some exhortation to refer to the web for additional information. It is not enough, however, to load up websites with information, if a significant portion of the primary target group is 'unconnected' or insufficiently 'tech savvy' to access it.

There will always be a lag between rate of technological advance and the rate at which people, including older people, are able to acquire new knowledge, exacerbated in many cases by a decline in knowledge retention.

Another great challenge is ensuring that information is accessible at the time and place that people need it.



In some situations, our expectations may be too high.

Shared memories play a central role in everyday communication. They are usually based on interpersonal and cultural knowledge of a shared past among members of a group. These memories are verbally conveyed in everyday conversations in real-world settings.

Shared memories are also used to create a feeling of connection and maintain a consistent feeling of identity within personal networks. In family conversations, shared memories function to structure and synchronise the shareable life story of the family as a group.

The key element here is that people are most comfortable with information received through someone they know and trust.

It is fundamentally unsound to rely on a communication strategy that uses unknown 'juniors' to communicate with 'seniors'. What is required instead is a strategy that reaches into the heart of the community using familial contacts.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** That the government establish a trial program that employs older people as specialist 'communicators'. The basic operation will engage a well-connected local person in the community with the role of delivering information throughout the local network of older people. Communicators might be people in their seventies, would be assigned a 'territory' well known to them, might be employed for a maximum of 20 hours per month, would receive training as required, and would collect feedback as well as deliver information.

A two-year trial program is envisaged, possibly outsourced to an NGO or attached to the Seniors Bureau, with continuation depending on the outcome of evaluation and lessons learned.

*Estimated impact on Forward Estimates:* Funding would provide for selection, training and support for 'communicators as well as employing a part-time project officer.

|                         | <b>2011-12</b> | <b>2012-13</b> | <b>2013-14</b> | <b>2014-15</b> |
|-------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| ‘Communicators’ Program | \$90,000       | \$90,000       | -              | -              |

There is a significant digital divide in Tasmania between urban and rural areas. People in country areas simply do not have access to the same quality of digital services as their city counterparts.

Today’s technology is so tightly woven into the fabric of society that digital deprivation can rightly be considered alongside, and strongly linked to, more traditional social deprivations, such as low income, unemployment, poor education, ill health and social isolation. To consider lack of access to digital technology as somehow less important underestimates the pace, depth and scale of technological change, and overlooks the way that different disadvantages can combine to deepen social exclusion.

While Tasmania is at the fore-front of the NBN digital roll-out, it is likely that people living on farming properties, or on the fringes of remote rural towns, will see little improvement in the short term. ‘Black spots’ for wi-fi or 3G services prevent mobile alternatives to fixed line. Satellite technology is acceptable but is unable to offer the sorts of speeds available in the city.

Lack of access to digital technology, inadequate broadband and mobile telephone coverage combined with lack of engagement with digital technology all contribute to a complex set of issues for rural communities and lead to disadvantages including:

- limited access to government services, and to the full range of social benefits available through interactive services, such as cheaper bills and healthcare diagnostics;
- limited job search opportunities and options such as online training, as well as limiting the social and recreational uses of the internet;
- increased isolation felt by many older people; and
- lack of high-speed broadband coverage stifles business innovation, social opportunities and innovative and integrated service delivery.

Effective use of technology can offer older people in rural communities very real opportunities to improve quality of life and support independent living for longer. Older people in rural communities can access services, information and make purchases at a time when post offices are closing down, bus services are being reduced and government services are increasingly moving online.

But if by 2012 we have a society where 50% of the population has very high speed broadband, 40% has first generation broadband but little prospect of market-led upgrade to next generation broadband, and up to 10% of homes are in not spots, not-a-lot spots or not-at-all-good spots, then the gulf in access and connectivity will appear starker than it is today.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** That the Government assign priority to (a) ensuring equitable access to digital services for people in rural areas, and (b) delivering education and training in relation to the uses and application of digital services to people in rural areas.

*Estimated impact on forward estimates:*

|                  | <b>2011-12</b> | <b>2012-13</b> | <b>2013-14</b> | <b>2014-15</b> |
|------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Digital Services | \$120,000      | \$120,000      | \$120,000      | -              |

## **PARTICIPATION**

*The more that people get together, the more friends they make and the more resilient and sustainable we are.*

It seems to be getting harder to get people out of their homes and properly engaged in their community. Where they were once localised to nearby houses and streets, personal networks tend to be dispersed over far wider areas. Modern technology enables us to maintain close friendships with people on the other side of the world.

The case has been made for correlation between social engagement and ‘ageing well’. Social relationships have powerful effects on both physical and mental health. Relations between people are enacted within lines of history and people construct their relationships with the world and others in the context of their ongoing personal histories.

Relationships with family members are often a critical component but can have both positive and negative effects, especially where there are tensions around expectations of care. In fact, relationships with close friends are a far more important to prolonging health and wellbeing than family connections.

Older people, community groups and public sector agencies are concerned about isolation and loneliness amongst older people. Research confirms that older people are more likely to be lonely in some areas than in others due to the physical design of neighbourhoods, access to social facilities, the rate of population ‘churn’ in the area, and the number of other older people living nearby. Events such as bereavement, retirement, and long-term illness may also create loneliness.

As people grow older, it takes a little more effort and planning to stay fully engaged with life. For most people socialisation is as important as physical activity.

Stress seems to be a key element of loneliness and high blood pressure. Discussing problems with someone else can instantly relieve stress.

People who are socially active may be less likely to develop cognitive impairment.

One of the most important and powerful ways to fight depression is to interact and engage with others. Untreated, depression can cause an older person to withdraw from social engagement, while spending more time with others can help recovery.

Chronic pain can have a major negative impact on quality of life. Maintaining social connection with others can be an important tool in decreasing the impact of pain. And people who are coping with chronic pain also report the positive effects of participating in support groups with others who are dealing with the same challenges.

Older people who grew up when participation in local communities was normal are seriously disadvantaged by the decline of social capital that has occurred in recent decades. Many of the options available to their parents and grandparents no longer exist. The social clubs have closed and nobody plays cards any more.

While people who socialise with their peers have better emotional, physical and mental health, the opposite is also true. The lack of opportunities for older people to socialise and form new relationships outside their homes is a critical problem, the symptoms of which are likely to manifest in declining health and wellbeing.

Hardly a trace remains of the model of community living that older people grew up with, and modern technology will prevent a return to that past.

On the one hand it is important to minimise the age-related constraints on an individual's ability to maintain their preferred pattern and levels of social engagement.

On the other hand, we need to construct a new community model which builds on the way people live their lives now, and that does not try to take people on a journey into the past.

Program propositions include:

- projects aimed at enhancing the number and quality of in-home encounters that bring people into the homes of otherwise isolated older people;
- programs built around identifying 'communities of interest' relevant to the individual and facilitating connections; and
- programs aimed at building better neighbourhoods.

In the last case, the aim is for more people to live in neighbourhoods where people of all ages can enjoy a good quality of life. These neighbourhoods will foster good relationships, not just within the generations of people in mid and later life, but between older people and those in younger generations. More people from different generations will get together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities. It will lead to greater understanding and respect and will enable communities to find common solutions to their problems. It will also ensure that young and old can share their knowledge and skills. By forging new friendships with younger people, older people will help reduce loneliness in this age-group – and vice versa.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:** That the government produce a guide on how to tackle loneliness and social isolation and facilitate the development of intergenerational projects in particular in rural and regional areas of the State.

*Estimated impact on Forward Estimates:*

|                                 | <i>2011-12</i> | <i>2012-13</i> | <i>2013-14</i> | <i>2014-15</i> |
|---------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Loneliness and Social Isolation | \$100,000      | -              | -              | -              |

*Higher Education* offers many ways for participation by older people. The normative view of Universities amongst academics is that they are places where a 'community of scholars' can work for an independent seeking of truth and knowledge, while helping to transmit culture based on critical inquiry. That idea, however, has been largely subsumed and transformed by market driven imperatives and governmental directives.

Senior adults are now more affluent, healthier, longer living and better educated than ever before and have a greater awareness that retirement can mean a new beginning rather than a slow ending.

The literature on human development suggests that participation in education promotes the health and quality of life of retirees by increasing participants' self-esteem, self-efficacy, problem-solving skills, aspirations, future orientation, interpersonal trust, social competency, anti-discriminatory attitudes, and sense of belonging.

The human subjectivity embedded in a senior's historical and social experiences of their learning is not only concerned with the consumption of content, but also with a desire to reflect, question, probe, research and rework to find a deeper meaning of self both in the act of discovering and in the discoveries made by engagement in learning. Whether

conscious of these outcomes or not, more and more senior adults are choosing to spend some part of their later years engaged in education at university.

At the same time, the presence of older (and wiser) people on campus can be of enormous benefit to younger students.

While younger people study with their future career in mind, older people at University tend to study primarily for the intrinsic value of the knowledge, and secondly for the social dimension that accompanies involvement in education.

At the later stage of personal development, individuals are turning to considerations in their life and interests in learning that are not linked to vocational or material needs. Participation in tertiary education is one way of dealing with and understanding this new way of being.

Small group qualitative research into the meanings and experiences of Senior Adult Learners at university will help to reveal and to inform the university and the wider community features that restrict, enhance or encourage fruitful learning for this cohort, as well as assist in research-based policy making efforts.

**RECOMMENDATION 6:** That research be undertaken to examine participation by older people in tertiary education so as to inform planning and underpin inclusion policies.

Discovering what older students think about their University experience will help inform stakeholders in Higher Education about appropriate policies and practices for this growing cohort.

*Estimated impact on Forward Estimates:*

|                           | <b>2011-12</b> | <b>2012-13</b> | <b>2013-14</b> | <b>2014-15</b> |
|---------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Higher Education Research | \$90,000       | -              | -              | -              |

#### *Adult Education and The Community Knowledge Network*

The University of the Third Age (U3A) are cooperative learning communities for retired and semi-retired people, run by volunteers on a non-profit basis. There are four U3As in the Greater Hobart Area, two in the Channel and one on the Tasmania Peninsula. There are *Schools for Seniors* based at Howrah, Launceston and Burnie.

There are Learning and Information Network Centres (LINC)s at Huonville, Kingston, Hobart, Glenorchy, Risdon Prison and Rosny, plus Burnie, Devonport and Launceston. New LINC)s are planned for Bridgewater, George Town, Queenstown, Scottsdale and Sorell.

In the current roster, Adult Education courses are available in each of the main metropolitan areas and some adjacent areas. In the south, only a handful of courses are offered in areas to the East of Hobart, and in the North only a few courses are offered outside Launceston. There is little or no public provision of adult learning on the West Coast, in the Central Highlands and Midlands, or anywhere on the East Coast.

Adult Education course fees have increased dramatically in recent years and concessions for older people do little to make courses more affordable. The requirement for up front payment of fees disadvantages people who have difficulty finding a lump sum, especially for extended courses with higher fees.

**RECOMMENDATION 7:** That the government, as a matter of urgency, take steps to (a) address the lack of adult education provision in rural areas, (b) adopt measures to facilitate the growth of the U3A concept outside southern urban centres, and (c) review fee concessions and payment arrangements to make participation more affordable for older people.

## **MOBILITY**

### *It's time to end mobility discrimination.*

After decades of research & analysis, surveys, submissions, strategies and action plans, there is little new to be said about the importance of mobility for older people. Nor is there much more to be said about the needs of the mobility challenged.

And yet transport is nearly always the first issue raised in COTA consultations with older community members. Some of the biggest problems are outside the main urban areas, where there is not always the critical mass of users, operators and suppliers needed to sustain private services. Commercial operators tend to pick the eyes out of the available routes and the government or not-for-profit groups cover the rest.

HACC funded *Community Transport* is an important component of meeting the needs of people in the HACC target group in rural areas, and the expanded coverage in recent years has been both necessary and welcome. But many older people who are not HACC clients need access to comparable services to maintain a reasonable quality of life.

Older people need safe transport options that preserve dignity, maximise independence and provide access to the full range of activities that contribute to quality of life; including work or volunteering; access to education, aged and health services; daily living including shopping, banking, library visits and recreation; maintaining family and community networks; and countering social isolation.

Reduced mobility compounds social exclusion. It denies the opportunity to access training, employment and opportunities for social interaction. For many people the erosion of their personal mobility can mean the loss of self-esteem and an independent lifestyle, which impacts negatively on their health and well being and places a greater dependence on support services.

The very nature of community transport depends upon the willingness and ability of local people to give their services. Delivery in small towns requires the development of partnerships between local community groups, local authorities and providers.

In any given region, people should have access to a mix of conventional and unconventional services that are responsive to demand by offering flexible routes and semi-structured timetables. The dispersed nature of population across rural areas leads to difficulties in the provision of public services.

Transport accessibility is acknowledged as a major element in achieving a reasonable lifestyle and standard of living (Tasmania Together Goal #1). It has been a prominent component of each of the two Positive Ageing Strategies developed to date. There appears to have been few outcomes from the Rural Transport Solutions Project mentioned in the latest Five Year Plan.

There appear to be no particular references to rural mobility or people who are mobility challenged in the Tasmanian Urban Passenger Transport Framework. The Draft Southern Integrated Transport Plan has plenty of focus on infrastructure, vehicles, roads, freight and people with an average level of physical fitness, but little focus on

rural people and no concern for people with reduced physical mobility. The same is true of the Northern Integrated Transport Plan (2003).

The publications, plans and strategies are the end product of a lot of serious work by serious people and will in one form or another direct the allocation of finances and resources to transport provision for the immediate future.

The most astonishing feature of all this work, however, is the absolute lack of any conversation about transport and mobility for people living outside of major activity centres. If you live outside the main commuter zones in Tasmania, there is virtually no recognition of mobility disadvantage and NO PLAN for addressing it.

How can this be explained? Is there an assumption that people who live outside cities can fend for themselves and if they can't manage, they should move to an urban centre? Are people who live in cities somehow more entitled than other Tasmanians?

It is tempting to speculate on what some of the plans and strategies might look like if they were written by people who lived in a rural area and who were able to see issues from a rural viewpoint.

**RECOMMENDATION 8:** That the government establish a Rural Transport Unit to focus specifically on travel and mobility issues from the viewpoint of rural people. The Unit should be based in a rural centre such as Campbell Town or Oatlands and include an ongoing position specifically designated to focus on mobility issues for older Tasmanians living in rural areas.

Given the observed lack of rural consciousness among transport thinkers and planners, it is envisaged that a period of around three years peak operation will be required for the Unit to play its part in raising the quality of the policy conversation before reducing to an ongoing maintenance level.

*Estimated impact on Forward Estimates:* To support paid staff and generate networks across the State.

|                      | <i>2011-12</i> | <i>2012-13</i> | <i>2013-14</i> | <i>2014-15</i> |
|----------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Rural Transport Unit | \$900,000      | \$910,000      | \$922,000      | \$600,000      |

Since 2008, the UK Government has been issuing passes that provide free country-wide local bus transport older people (over 60s) and people with disabilities, based on agreements with the Confederation of Passenger Transport UK. Driving licence renewal fees have been abolished for people over 70 years of age. A range of other minor fees and charges have also been abolished for older people.

In general, the loss of income from these fees has been fully offset by removing the cost of administering systems for this age group.

Similar measures have been implemented in a number of other European states. Some cities offer universally free public transport, yielding great reductions in road use, traffic congestion, road accidents and environmental pollution.

Irrespective of the economics question, the decision to provide free public transport for older people is a definitive recognition of the increased risk of travel disadvantage that comes with age and simultaneously an expression of thanks from a community grateful for their lifetime contribution.

There has been a dramatic increase in the use of public buses by older people as a result of removing the cost restraint. The most reported outcome for older people has been increased participation in community activities and events. There is a clear connection between ‘freedom of movement’ and community participation levels and community resilience.

Metro Tasmania offers an adult fare concession for people over 70 years of age equivalent to 25-50% on short to medium trips, 50% on non-urban routes, and around 33% on day trips. Concessions offered by private operators are generally less than 50% and information about prices in many cases is only available at the point of purchase.

Even the discounted cost of public transport may be a significant deterrent to travel for people whose daily lifestyle choices are heavily dependent on the level of the aged pension. It will certainly be a strong determinant of travel frequency and distance. At the same time, people are more inclined to use a private vehicle.

**RECOMMENDATION 9:** That the government institute free public transport on Metro services for people over the age of 70 and explore means of extending this to people in areas not serviced by Metro through subsidies and agreements with private operators.

*Note: Expected outcomes in the behaviour of older people include: an increased inclination to choose public over private transport and an increased inclination to leave home and engage in the community.*

Following on, it is noted that the *Seniors Card* system is likely to have delivered a range of efficiencies in administering services and provision for people in older age groups. The ‘savings’ in administration cost delivered by the system should be returned to the primary consumers.

**RECOMMENDATION 10:** That the government conduct a review of all areas of fees and charges (such as driving licence fees) as they relate to people over the age of 70 and apply administrative saving to introduce additional exemptions or rebates.

## **LIFESTYLE**

*When I retire, I'd like to move to Tasmania!*

Ask anyone who has just moved here from interstate and they'll tell you Tasmania is a **wonderful** place to live. They bombard the natives with questions about why it's not better promoted and how we've managed to keep it a secret.

Older people moving here to live out their retirement are a good part of the population growth of recent years. The choice may have been motivated by financial considerations (e.g. lower land prices), but in most cases it quickly changes into a ‘love of place’.

While there may be concerns about the cost of future health and community care provision, the wealth that these retirees bring with them often makes a substantial contribution to the local economy. Their presence infuses their new community with new ideas and some set up new businesses.

When things get tougher due to injury, poor health or death, some find that Tasmania doesn't quite measure up. The entertainment options are not as wide and varied. The cold weather keeps people at home and isolated. Some return to the mainland.

Are the expectations created by its spectacular scenery, its heritage and the warmth and friendliness, ultimately disappointed by the everyday reality for older people? Is Tasmania age-friendly?

The idea of branding Tasmania in such a way as to make people dream of moving to Tasmania to retire is ambitious but full of potential. It may require major changes to make sure that Tasmania really is a great place in which to grow old.

**RECOMMENDATION 11:** That the government develops a promotion strategy which aims to establish Tasmania as the best part of Australia in which to retire. This should be accompanied by a qualitative study amongst older people to obtain some assessment of how good growing old in Tasmania is and what needs to be improved.

*Estimated impact on Forward Estimates:*

|                             | 2011-12   | 2012-13 | 2013-14 | 2014-15 |
|-----------------------------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|
| Retire in Tasmania Strategy | \$200,000 | -       | -       | -       |

### *Living Longer Living Stronger*

The LLLS Program was a COTA managed scheme that partnered with operators of commercial gyms and sports centres to provide easy pathways for older people to participate in structured physical exercise.

The LLLS Program has a sound evidence base and has been shown to make positive contributions to the health and wellbeing of older people in Victoria and Western Australia. Although evidence of the effectiveness of the program in Tasmania is not well documented and despite the fact that the program officially no longer operates in Tasmania due to funding cuts, the LLLS name has continued to survive in the community, attracting older people to participate in physical activity.

Despite the ongoing support of operators, the lack of program coordination has meant that participation has dwindled, less new people participating and the program has not grown beyond Hobart. To aid in the development of quality physical activity programs for older adults a one stop provider needs to be funded to link all existing programs and to build new programs based on evidence and need. For many years this sector has been overlooked and has been delivered in a small scale and disjointed manner. To be able to provide a central voice for recreational, health, leisure and lifestyle activities for this group would provide immense benefits to reduce isolation, build fitness, build awareness and reduce many health related illness.

**RECOMMENDATION 12:** That the government provide funding to re-institute the Living Longer Living Stronger Program in Tasmania on an ongoing basis and extend it State-wide.

*Estimated impact on Forward Estimates:*

|                               | 2011-12   | 2012-13   | 2013-14   | 2014-15 |
|-------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------|
| Living Longer Living Stronger | \$120,000 | \$120,000 | \$120,000 | -       |

## **SECURITY OF PLACE**

*Discrimination makes you feel unsafe.*

Intergenerational reports and other studies have raised the consciousness in recent years of the potential social and economic effects of the demographic bulge that will occur as the ‘baby boomers’ retire. The projected pressure on people of workforce age to produce more to meet the costs of additional service demand could threaten social harmony to compound the economic stress.

Apprehension about the growing economic burden has already prompted the Federal Government to raise the age at which people qualify for the aged pension. The concept of compulsory retirement from the public service has been largely discarded in all jurisdictions and efforts are being made to encourage people to stay in the workforce longer.

Under the circumstances, it is expected that governments would be working equally hard to remove obstacles and barriers to people working longer. Failure to act in certain key areas will ultimately determine the success of the strategy.

Tasmania is now the only state where the provisions in anti-discrimination legislation continue to allow employers to compel people to retire against their wishes. Specifically s35 (Retirement on basis of age) of the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1998* states that: “a person may discriminate against another person on the ground of age in relation to ...voluntary or compulsory retirement”.

Legislation dealing with Workers Compensation provides for changes in quantum of provision to an injured employee past the age of retirement, irrespective of whether they would have chosen to retire or not.

The continuing existence of such provisions is anti-discriminatory and does not provide a ‘level playing field’ for mature age or older workers. Failure to address these matters will limit the effectiveness of steps to extend peoples’ working lives.

**RECOMMENDATION 13:** That the government amend anti-discrimination and workers compensation legislation to remove provisions that make it possible to discriminate against people on the basis of age, and reference a thorough review of other legislation that might have a similar effect.

*Policing & Community Safety*

Feeling safe is a critical element for older people using public transport and continuing to be mobile and active in their community. Measures are needed to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour on and around public transport.

Poorly maintained or managed local facilities, such as paths and steps, can make people feel at risk outside their own immediate surroundings.

**RECOMMENDATION 14:** That the government fund surveys to identify community safety issues that are important to older people and help develop mechanisms with police and local government throughout the State to follow up on concerns.

*Estimated impact on Forward Estimates:*

|                  | <i>2011-12</i> | <i>2012-13</i> | <i>2013-14</i> | <i>2014-15</i> |
|------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Community Safety | \$90,000       | \$90,000       | \$90,000       | -              |

**THE COST OF LIVING**

The English Poor Law of 1601 was the first attempt to express English ideas about the responsibility of the state to provide for the welfare of its citizens. The law was both generous and harsh at the same time: generous in acknowledging a government duty to provide for the welfare of the poor, but harsh in viewing the poor as highly undesirable characters.

The Australian age pension was introduced in 1908, although Aboriginal people, Africans, Pacific Islanders and New Zealand Maoris were excluded. It was paid at age 65 for men and women, at a time when men had a life expectancy of 55 and women 59. It has endured through 100 years of profound social and economic change, two world wars, a depression, recessions and booms and remains the primary system of providing income support to older Australians in need.



But just as it was understood in 17<sup>th</sup> Century England, we understand that cost of living pressures can make it hard to make ends meet. The combination of fixed or unreliable incomes in an era of steadily increasing prices can ruin health and shorten lives.

The Global Financial Crisis has been responsible for massive devaluation of assets, including superannuation savings. Some retirees with significant investments have been caught in the bind of collapsing asset values while still being unable to claim an age pension.

For people living outside metropolitan areas, the combination of higher prices for fuel and longer distances to services, often force people to make uncomfortable choices. Declining health increases the need to travel while simultaneously making it harder to do so, especially when private transport becomes unavailable.

Social networks provide opportunities for social support, social influence, social engagement, interpersonal contact and access to financial and health care resources. But maintaining those networks usually comes at a cost and when the ends won't meet, social networks can be the first things to be lost.



The second key understanding is that poverty does not discriminate. It is a 'no-fault' proposition. We all hope to be sufficiently well-off to enjoy a comfortable retirement. Nobody plans to be poor.

Life events such as divorce and widowhood can significantly alter the living situation and future options of older people. There is a recognised preference for people to stay in their own homes but the loss of a partner can make this unaffordable. The 14% of older Tasmanians in rental accommodation are at the mercy of market forces that have no respect for levels of disposable income.



The third key understanding is that older people living in poverty have fewer options to supplement low incomes, especially if health is an issue. There are no employment services funded to assist people over 70 to find work!

Every day involves choices about things to do without. Things like education courses are out of the question. Social outings, alcohol and tobacco, recreation and cultural activities become indulgences. Transport is out and there is not enough money for those little repairs around the house: there is no affording a tradesman for anything but the most essential need. There will be no new furniture or appliances, use of the phone will be strictly rationed and clothing will have to last.

And in the most dire of situations, the choice involves going without essentials like food, health & personal care; and possibly falling into homelessness.

Ultimately, the ‘cost of living’ is the cost of maintaining a certain standard of living. For older people, the standard of living is primarily defined in terms of an acquired perception of a ‘good life’. The maintenance of that standard of living is central to successful ageing.

Measures, both social and economic, are needed to give older Tasmanians the best possible chance of enjoying a good standard of life. Amongst these are:

- The removal of constraints to full participation and engagement in community life;
- A more generous approach to certain fees and charges for older Tasmanians;
- Where special individual circumstances warrant, the waiving of charges for certain essential services; and
- Addressing the dire inequity between country and city.

As already highlighted, the circumstances in which an increase in the cost of living can put some older Tasmanians at a severe disadvantage are wide and varied. Our older population are one of the most resilient groups but this only goes so far. Developing properly inclusive and targeted policies to address the need requires a far better picture of the scope and scale of issues than is currently available. Older people need adequate and timely information on their energy consumption and efficiency, including how extensive use of energy increases their cost of living. Such targeted information would ensure that older people make informed and cost effective choices about what is needed to use less energy thereby reducing their energy bills and reliance in unsustainable energy products and services for example: providing info on where to get cheap solar hot water systems is great but to also provide info on tradesman who can give installation discounts is even better.. It is only by empowering older people through information at a local and accessible level that efficient use of energy can be achieved.

A more balanced and strategic approach to research and action is needed; one that marshals resources from all stakeholders including older people themselves both in the formulation of research plans and the allocation of resources.

**RECOMMENDATION 15:** That the government establish a Research and Action Round Table to develop research partnerships between government, research establishments, older people and other sectors, to provide a forum for discussion of strategic issues relevant to the trends, opportunities and challenges of an older more vulnerable Tasmanian population. The RART would assist to hold heating and utility cost forums for older Tasmanians across the State focussing on rural communities.

It is envisaged that the Round Table would include participation by representatives from:

*The Tasmanian Government Seniors Bureau*

*Council on the Ageing (TAS) Inc.*

*The University of Tasmania (Dept of Rural Health, etc)*

*The Menzies Centre for Population Research*

*Aged Services Tasmania*

*Commonwealth Dept of Family, Housing, Community Services & Indigenous Affairs*

*Migrant Resource centre*

*Other relevant stakeholders.*

The Round Table will identify and promote initiatives for research and action that will help create innovative policy and practice in Tasmania.

*Estimated impact on Forward Estimates:*

|  | <b>2011-12</b> | <b>2012-13</b> | <b>2013-14</b> | <b>2014-15</b> |
|--|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
|  | \$200,000      | \$200,000      | \$200,000      | -              |

**RECOMMENDATION 16:** That the Government fund COTA (Tas) to employ a project officer to engage with older Tasmanians to understand their information needs on energy consumption and efficiency. The project would also develop information education strategies' using a peer Education model to reduce their energy consumption and increase efficiency. It is also suggested that the Govt and COTA partner to help older Tasmanians to understand and initiate/install energy efficiency measures in their homes.

*Estimated impact on Forward Estimates:*

|                            | <b>2011-12</b> | <b>2012-13</b> | <b>2013-14</b> | <b>2014-15</b> |
|----------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Energy Consumption Project | \$140,000      | \$140,000      | \$140,000      | -              |

## **ABOUT COTA (TAS)**

COTA (Tas) is an autonomous member of the national COTA network, operating as a peak body for a wide range of organisations and individuals who are committed to supporting the contributions of older persons. COTA works to encourage communities to think positively about ageing. It does this by championing the rights and interests of all older people in Tasmania and by promoting and supporting social inclusion.

COTA (Tas) has four primary roles:

- Representing members as a peak body;
- Maximising cooperation locally and nationally between service providers and consumer bodies of older people;
- Raising community awareness of issues of concern to older people; and
- Promoting policies practices and services that advance well-being and justice for older people.

COTA (Tas) receives core funding for these peak body roles from the *Tasmanian Department of Premier and Cabinet* and the *Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing*, with specific project funding sourced from *the Tasmanian Community Fund*, the *National Prescribing Service* and from *beyond blue*.

COTA (Tas) is currently implementing a program of appointing 'COTA Champions' in communities throughout the State. Resources permitting, it is envisaged that it will grow into a network of local people who are well-connected to what is happening in their communities and who sit at the core of local conversations and communications.

This network will provide a reliable and secure resource for communication and research. It will enable COTA (Tas) to sample issues that are of direct concerns at the very grass roots level of the community in a highly responsive way. It will provide a reliable method for the delivery and dissemination of information directly into the heart of the community.

COTA (Tas) will make extensive use of this resource to formulate future submissions to government and preparing input to policy forums.