

MEDIA RELEASE

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BUDGET 2016: some great news, some missed opportunities, some concerns

Australia's leading seniors' advocacy organisation, COTA Australia, today labeled the overall effect of the 2016 Federal budget a mixed bag for older people with some great measures around superannuation but missed opportunities in aged care, housing and mature age employment.

COTA Australia Chief Executive Ian Yates said he welcomed the initiatives which put superannuation back on the path for which it was originally intended and ensured women and low income workers had more opportunities to save for their retirement (*see separate COTA media release on the superannuation reform package*).

Mr Yates said older Australians will be disappointed that the next steps in aged care reform had been left out of the 2016 Budget with no timeframe for ensuring people can access the aged care they need, when they need it.

"Unfortunately, aged care is still a rationed system which means people who have been assessed and approved as eligible for care don't get it because of the rationing.

"This means thousands of older people still languish on long aged care waiting lists or may have to move to inappropriate care or care far from loved ones.

"The \$136 million contained in the budget to improve My Aged Care website and Contact Centre is very welcome but needs to be accompanied by other major measures to address the core failures in our aged care system.

"This includes giving older Australians control over their own residential aged care in the same way they will have control over their home care packages next February. This is a huge missed opportunity.

"COTA, the National Aged Care Alliance and the government's own Aged Care Sector Committee's Roadmap for Reform have all laid out a clear path for change over the next five years.

"This budget was a great opportunity for the government to commit to that process and timeframe for achieving this overdue reform.

"We will be forcefully arguing to all political parties to adopt this commitment as we move into the Federal election campaign."

Mr Yates said he was also concerned about the removal of the carbon tax compensation for future pensioners and benefit recipients.

"While the rest of the population enjoys the benefits of the restructured income tax arrangements which were put in place for the carbon tax, it seems unfair that those who have least resources will have these benefits withdrawn."

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Mr Yates said it is concerning that there a range of other significant issues which largely absent from the 2016 Budget. These include:

- An increase in the Newstart Allowance – 25% of Newstart recipients are over 50 and are driven into poverty by long term unemployment;
- Measures to increase mature age workforce participation and reduce age discrimination;
- Affordable housing measures to address the increasing rates of homelessness and housing stress for older people; and
- New measures to address mental health needs of older people and in particular the high rates of suicide in men over 80.

COTA would also be keen to see the details of the administrative efficiencies being sought in the Department of Human Services which amount to \$80million over four years and could impact on the Department's already questionable ability to provide quality services.

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