

MEDIA RELEASE

8 May 2018

Federal Budget 2018 – welcome commitment to better planning for an ageing population and aged care

Australia's leading seniors' advocacy organisation, COTA Australia has welcomed the Federal Budget as a positive step towards preparing for and supporting an older population and capitalising on the opportunities it presents.

COTA Australia Chief Executive Ian Yates said the Government's *More Choices for a Longer Life` Package* will ensure better co-ordination of services across government and more support for Australians at every stage of their life.

"This is the first time we have had a full ageing package that takes a proactive approach to an ageing Australia and takes a life cycle approach that recognizes the need to prepare properly for an ageing population and support all Australians as they move through life.

"The challenge now is to make sure that this is not a one off, so we will be asking the Government to commit to an Ageing Strategy that will tie the Budget measures together, monitor their progress and recommend change and expansion based on experience, making sure the momentum begun tonight carries through for all Australians as they age.

"Every cent spent on supporting independence as we age, keeping people connected to the workforce and community, and on preventative health, is money saved in emergency wards, acute health care and on our already stretched aged care system.

"This Budget goes a significant way towards helping Australians continue to work if they choose to do so, help Australians plan financially for their retirement, and support us all as we get older by improving access to home care and choice in aged care."

Aged care (home and residential)

"The aged care package is a substantial implementation of the recommendations of the Tune Legislated Review and will change the face of aged care towards greater consumer control.

"The injection of 20,000 high needs home packages (6,000 in MYEFO and 14,000 tonight), in addition to the growth already built into the forward estimates, will ensure more older Australians waiting for home care will receive a package over the next year and the merging of Home Care and Residential funding pools will make more Home Care Packages possible in future.

"We strongly welcome the government's in principle decision to put residential beds in the hands of consumers and funding the development of a plan to achieve this. We need a commitment to a specific date for this change at latest by next year's Budget".

Until then with residential care allocated to providers, but not in response to consumer demand, older Australians still do not have the ability to choose their nursing home, and good providers are restrained from responding to consumer preferences.

“We also strongly welcome the government’s commitment of \$82 million to a new mental health program for residential care, as well as a \$20 million trial of new mental health initiatives in the community, and other support services to keep people connected to community.

“We also welcome increased funds for palliative care in residential aged care, where too many older people now end their life in less than ideal circumstances.

Supporting mature age workers

“We welcome the proactive approach to an ageing Australia that takes a whole of life-cycle approach, which includes some very good measures to support employment opportunities for mature aged workers, particularly the employment and health checkpoint at age 45 backed up by a range of support services.

“It’s good to see the government tackling the issue from a number of angles, including support for older entrepreneurs wanting to set up a small business. Investing in growing the productivity of the mature age workforce will pay big dividends over time.

COTA looks forward to working with the government to promote programs and fight ageism in our employment market.”

Retirement Incomes

The Budget includes a welcome range of measures to improve the standard of living of older Australians, including:

- Increasing the Pension Work Bonus by \$50 a fortnight so that retirees on the Age Pension can earn up to \$300 per fortnight that’s not taken into account for the pension income test, encouraging them to supplement pension income and stay connected to the workforce
- Amending the pension means test to encourage the development and take-up of lifetime retirement income products, supporting the development of Comprehensive Income Products for Retirement (CIPRs)
- Dramatically expanding access to the Pension Loan scheme to everyone over pension age and increasing the maximum fortnightly income to 150% to of the Age Pension rate, which will allow older people to access their home equity to supplement retirement income, pay for extra aged care, undertake home modifications, and other needs

We also welcome the measures ‘in the *Protecting your Super Package* to cap admin fees, ban exit fees, stop people having to have multiple insurance policies, and returning lost super.

Elder Abuse

“We welcome additional funds for elder abuse initiatives and the Federal Government taking leadership in the development of a national framework and approach, including a national register of enduring powers of attorney.

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