



COTA Over 50s Ltd.  
PO Box 3508  
MANUKA ACT 2603  
Phone: 02 6295 1844  
Fax: 02 6295 1807  
Email: [info@cotaover50s.org.au](mailto:info@cotaover50s.org.au)

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## **BUDGET CURATE'S EGG FOR OLDER AUSTRALIANS**

The nest egg in Wayne Swan's Budget has some commendable initiatives for Australia's future. But in terms of the current needs of older Australians it is only good in parts.

"The Treasurer has missed an opportunity to fully establish the government's credentials as one that is setting the foundations for a robust future. While the rocket takes off, many older Australians are still left gasping on the launch pad", said Dr Geoffrey Bird, Executive Director of national group COTA Over 50s.

"The inadequacy of pensions remains the single biggest impediment to the wellbeing of hundreds of thousands of our citizens. These are people who have worked hard, scrimped and scraped to educate their children and paid their taxes. The cost of living is soaring and the pension bumps along on the bottom. A token change to the way pensions are indexed will nowhere near address the cost of living gap. There is a lot of talk in the Budget about providing a buffer against the vagaries of international uncertainty. Pensioners could do with a buffer against the vagaries of daily living price hikes.

"The Treasurer has turned in a Budget with a 3.6 billion dollar surplus above the 1.5 per cent of GDP that was promised. Is it too much to expect that some of this could have been directed immediately to people who have given a lot to this country, and will continue to give a lot if they can eat well enough to stay healthy and remain mobile enough to stay connected?

"We asked on Budget night, where is the government's response to the Senate report on the living costs of older Australians? Where's the review of pensions that the Senate and every other serious analyst has called for? We are glad that Finance Minister Tanner has heeded that call and said that a review of pensions will be part of the proposed review of the tax system.

"We're delighted to see a renewed focus on dental health. But the focus is short. If you're a pensioner, good luck with the waiting list. If you're in residential aged care, sit by while the dentists and hygienists argue over who has the right to visit you to treat you – let alone actually appear at your door. Last year we commissioned sophisticated research that showed that improved dental care would deliver a net gain of \$42 million through savings on serious illness arising from poor dental health. The Health Minister has publicly reiterated the connection between poor dental health and serious illness. Let's see some more dental health action that would actually deliver net benefits to older Australians and substantial savings to taxpayers.

"Older Australians will no doubt benefit incidentally from the health and hospital reforms and other worthwhile initiatives. And many will be grateful that the Rudd government seems to be taking its responsibilities to future generations of Australians seriously. Our grandchildren will benefit greatly, and that is very pleasing. **But if you're a retiree on a fixed income, or a pensioner barely getting by, you won't feel any different today than you did the day before Wayne Swan stood up in parliament and said he would deliver what our nation needs at this time of international turbulence, and high inflation at home**".

### **CONTACT:**

**Dr Geoffrey Bird      Mobile : 0409 705 951**  
**Executive Director**  
**COTA Over 50s Ltd**