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COTA NATIONAL Policy Newsletter

April 2010 | Issue 1



Welcome to the first issue of our new COTA national policy newsletter. It will be published every two months but we will send out short Policy Alerts in between as circumstances require.

This issue catches you up with a wide range of national policy activity over the year to date. It has been a busy period for us, especially since the appointment of Ms Jo Root as National Policy Manager in late September 2009. This followed the substantial restructure of our national operations in mid 2009 and the appointment of Ian Yates as Chief Executive.

It is an exciting time for the COTAs at present after some years of challenge. We have agreed on a new COTA policy

development process statement - on which more detail in the next issue. We are also about to adopt a new constitution that will update our governance arrangements and rename us "COTA Australia".

COTAs are growing individual and organisational membership again and member services are expanding. Other developments will be announced over coming months as COTAs cooperate around new joint initiatives.

One imminent, exciting event is COTA VIC's hosting of the 2010 International Federation on Ageing Conference 3-6 May on the theme "Climate for Change: Ageing into the Future". There are still some places available if you register fast - go to www.ifa2010.org.

As this goes to press we await the much anticipated announcement of aged care reform initiatives as part of the government's health reform process. This will include the terms of reference of the long promised Productivity Commission inquiry on how to implement aged care reform, plus, we hope, a number of immediate steps to protect older Australians' aged care needs until the Commission reports. COTA has been playing a key role in these discussions.

We hope this newsletter is useful for readers. Pleased don't hesitate to pass it on, and to email us with the addresses of people who should be on the (e)mailing list.

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Chair - National Policy Council

Ian Yates AM
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Meetings

26-27 May 2009

The National Policy Council had a productive meeting that discussed a wide range of issues illustrating the breadth of issues that impact on older people and the need to have a coordinated approach to tackling them. The reports from all the States and Territories showed there is a high level of energy around policy issues affecting older people with some emerging issues around age friendly environments, environmental change and human rights which will get further discussion at the next meeting.

There were three key national issues discussed in detail. In the discussion on retirement incomes the increase in the single pension was welcomed but agreed that it was just the first step towards ensuring retirement incomes are adequate to sustain a reasonable standard of living. It was agreed that COTA would continue its work on improving pensions and other retirement incomes and continue to play an active role in the Fair Go for Pensioners Coalition. Related to this was concern around the raising of the age pension age to 67 and it was agreed that COTA would do some further work around identifying ways to reduce barriers to mature aged employment.

The discussion paper from the Older Persons Affordable Housing Alliance was discussed and endorsed with COTA to continue to work with ACSA to push for an Older Persons Affordable Housing Strategy. Concerns were raised around the costs of universal design making it unacceptable for public housing but it was agreed that this should be the ultimate goal.

The other key policy area to be discussed in detail was aged care with much of the discussion focusing on the National Aged care Alliance (NACA) paper "Leading the Way; A Vision for Support and Care of Older Australians".

It was agreed that COTA should give priority to significant reform of aged care in line with the NACA vision and that this should be in the Federal Budget Submission and the campaign leading up to the Federal election.

10-11 November 2009

This was the first meeting of the new format for the NPC, with one representative from each State and Territory Policy Council supported by a staff member from each COTA, the Chair, the Chief Executive of COTA National and the National Policy Manager.

One of the key outcomes was agreement on new principles to underpin all COTA's work and the policy development process. This provides greater clarity of roles and responsibilities between the State and Territory COTAs and COTA National and will make us more responsive in a rapidly changing policy environment.

The main national policy discussions were around aged care and mature aged employment. On aged care the discussion focused on the ACSA/COTA roundtable in October which looked at models for funding to ensure long term sustainability. It was agreed that there would be discussion of the possible models at all the State/Territory Policy Councils in the first half of 2010.

On mature aged employment there was discussion around the barriers older people face both in terms of employment and training, Reducing ageism and age discrimination through changing attitude of employers and the wider community is seen as critical if there is to be any improvement. More details on both of these are in the relevant policy sections below.

The Federal Budget Submission was discussed and the NPC agreed on the recommendations for aged care, health, employment, housing, income support, transport and essential services. The final submission can be found at www.cotanational.org.au.

The State and Territory roundup again showed the strength and depth of work across the country. Whilst all the COTAs have their own priorities some common themes emerged around retirement village legislation, enduring powers of attorney and aged friendly communities.

Minutes for both meetings available at www.cotanational.org.au

Submissions

COTA National has been active in highlighting seniors issues in response to a number of inquiries and other policy development processes as listed below

- Submission to the National Disability Parking Scheme Harmonisation Review being undertaken by FaHCSIA.
- Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Suicide where the emphasis of our Submission was on the high rate of suicide of older men and the need for targeted response to reduce this rate. Ian Yates and Jo Root appeared as witnesses at the Committee hearing in Canberra on 24 March where we were able to provide more information to the Committee.
- Federal Budget Submission in which we have recommendations for action in seven key policy areas; aged care, employment, health, housing, retirement incomes, transport, and essential services.
- Response to the National consultations on National Women's Health policy where we highlight the needs of older women
- Submission to the review of the Aged Care Funding instrument submitted to DoHA on 11 March. We also contributed to the NACA submission to this review.

All COTA National Submissions can be found at www.cotanational.org.au

Spotlight

highlighting
work in our
key policy
areas



Housing

The decrease in housing affordability has become a major concern in the community with all levels of Government, through the Council of Australian Governments, agreeing on a package of measures to improve the situation.

The Fair Go for Pensioners Campaign highlighted the difficulties faced by aged pensioners who rent in the private rental market.

To help address this issue COTA joined with Aged and Community Services Australia and the Brotherhood of St Laurence (who have since left the Alliance) to form the Older Persons Affordable Housing Alliance. This Alliance has developed a discussion paper outlining the issues and the key components of a proposed Older Persons Housing Strategy that addresses the particular needs of older people for appropriate and affordable housing to assist more people to age in the community.

Key elements of the Strategy are

- Measures to ensure the existing housing stock, both public and private are safe and meets older people's need. This would involve a more concerted effort on home modification and maintenance.
- Increasing the supply of social and public housing that is specifically for older people and ensuring older people get equitable access to housing covered by the National Rental Affordability Scheme.
- Ensuring that all new housing, public and private, is built to universal design standards to allow people to age in place.

The discussion paper is available at www.cotanational.org.au

In November 2009 Ian Yates and Greg Mundy from ACSA had constructive discussions with the Federal Ministers for Housing and Ageing as well as the Opposition spokesperson and officers from the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).

We have also included the main recommendations from the discussion paper in our Federal Budget submission. FaHCSIA has recently agreed to fund a survey of all low income Independent Living Units which was one of the key recommendations in the paper. This survey will provide comprehensive information on the current state of the ILUs and give a solid platform for estimating the cost of bringing them up to current standards so that they can be put back into the accommodation pool.

We will continue, as part of the Alliance, to work on this issue as we move towards the Federal Election later in 2010.

Spotlight

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Aged care

There is renewed interest in aged care reform and we have been involved in two key developments as well as continuing to participate in a wide range of working groups and committees looking at this issue.

The first of these was the development of the National Aged Care Alliance vision statement "Leading the Way- Our vision for Support and Care of Older Australians". COTA is one of the sponsor members of NACA and Ian Yates led the development of the vision and played a key role in ensuring it was endorsed by all members of NACA, consumers, providers and professional groups.

The vision is built around putting the older person first. It is a long time reform agenda that fundamentally changes the way aged care services are designed and delivered as it seeks to place older people at its centre with a choice of timely, accessible and affordable services that meet their needs. The emphasis is on providing care in the community for as long as possible through a responsive support and care system that changes the mix of services as people's needs change. This would be complemented by a high quality residential care system for when people are unable to continue in the community.

The NACA Budget submission puts forward a number of recommendations that seek to implement the Vision and our federal budget submission mirrors these. COTA is chairing the NACA working group on an implementation plan that will then form the basis of the NACA position for the federal election late this year.

The vision can be found at www.naca.asn.au. The NACA vision put an emphasis on ensuring services are sustainable and funded appropriately. Leading on from vision work COTA joined with ACSA to hold a roundtable on sustainable funding for aged care services. This was held in October 2009 and brought together consumers, service providers, academics and financial experts to look at potential

funding models that would meet the growing need for capital funding as well as operating funds.

Two approaches were examined in detail. The first was to continue with the current situation of funding from consolidated revenue with additional user contributions in the form of bonds or similar capital payments. The second was to move to a social insurance system with contributions from the whole community that would be collected and used for this specific purpose. COTA has previously supported social insurance models

At the November National Policy Council (NPC) meeting we agreed that there would be discussions at the State/Territory level in early 2010 around the models to ensure we have engaged with our membership on the issue. The joint discussion paper on this model has been finalised and consultations with the State policy councils have commenced and will continue through April and May to inform the discussion at the June NPC meeting.

This would then give us a well developed position to present to the upcoming Productivity Commission Inquiry into aged care.

Updates

highlighting work in our key policy areas



Retirement Incomes

COTA National is providing the Secretariat for the newly formed National Fair Go For Pensioners Coalition which is chaired by Patricia Reeve from COTA Victoria. We will continue to support the Coalition's claims for further increases in the aged pension as well as looking at other retirement income issues as they arise.

Health

The National Health and Hospital Reform Commission reported in June 2009 and the Federal Government undertook over 100 consultations with health professionals across the country to inform its response to that report along with the proposed National Primary Health Care Strategy and the report from the Preventative Health Taskforce.

On March 3 the Prime Minister released the first stage of his reform proposal, the National Health and Hospital Network which will be discussed at the Council of Australian Governments meeting

in April 2010. The focus of this first set of announcements was the funding arrangements for hospitals and primary health care with the Commonwealth proposing to take over 60 and 100 per cent funding responsibility respectively. There will be further announcements covering range of other health issues including more detail on primary health care, aged care, eHealth and others. We will develop a response to the reform agenda once we have the full set of proposals.

We continue to work on specific health issues as they arise. In 2009 one of the key such issues as the proposal from the federal Government to reduce the Medicare rebate for cataract surgery which potentially affects many thousands of older people. Our major objective was to ensure that people would continue to have access to surgery when they needed it and at a price they could afford. This was finally resolved in February 2010 with the ophthalmologists and Federal government agreeing a new rebate level.

Employment

This is shaping up to be a major policy area in 2010. We have developed a position paper (available at www.cotanational.org.au) and have had some preliminary discussions with officers from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations around how we can work with them on this issue.

On 1 February 2010 the Federal Treasurer in conjunction with the Minister for Employment Participation announced a Productive Ageing package worth \$43 million aimed increasing mature aged participation in the workforce. As part of that same package Minister Arbib established the Mature Aged Participation Consultative Forum and Ian Yates was invited to participate in that. The Forum met in February and will meet twice more this year.

We will continue to work on this issue both within the Forum and on a bilateral basis with the Government.

COMING UP/ TO WATCH

- Productivity Commission Inquiry into Aged Care which is expected to commence in the first half of 2010 and be completed by the mid 2011. The terms of reference have yet to be announced. COTA will be putting in a submission
- The Australia's Future Tax System Review Panel (sometimes referred to as the Henry Review) has delivered its final report to the Federal Government. The Government will release the report along with its initial response to the recommendations before the May 2010 Federal budget. It is likely to make recommendations that affect superannuation and pensions retirement incomes.
- International Federation on Ageing Tenth Global Conference 3-6 May 2010 in Melbourne www.ifa2010.org
- COTA National Policy Forum 16 June, Canberra- Ageism and Age Discrimination