

MEDIA RELEASE

Pensioners Hungry for Action

Pensioners and organisations concerned about the struggle to maintain an adequate quality of life on the pension, welcome the opportunity to have their say in Melbourne on 22nd September, when the Harmer Pension Review comes to town.

“Pensioners will finally have the chance to put their case on how hard it is to make ends meet on the pension, let alone enjoy a quality of life that many of us take for granted,” said Sue Hendy, Executive Director of Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victoria.

“They hope the government will acknowledge this ongoing struggle, hear their voices and seek to effect real change for the many of the most poorest people in our community.”

“Forty-eight percent of retired people are among the poorest 30 per cent of Australians, and for 75 per cent of retirees, a pension is their principal source of income. The Westpac ASFA (the Association of Superannuation Funds of Australia) Retirement Standard identifies a single pensioner as requiring around \$350 per week to live at a modest level, which is very modest indeed. The full single pension is currently \$273 per week.”

“Too often pensioners are forced to make choices between paying bills and paying for medications or food, and other essential items. This not only means that pensioners have meagre lifestyles, but their health and well-being are severely compromised,” said Ms Hendy. “The luxury of buying gifts or enjoying simple pleasures like going to the movies or other activities with friends, don’t even come into the equation.”

“Recent surveys show that the community supports an increase in the single pension by *at least* \$30 a fortnight. Many people would argue that this is simply not enough, and does not address the needs of couples living on the pension, and other disadvantaged groups,” Ms Hendy said.

“COTA has a four-point plan for the Federal Government:

1. Instruct the Harmer review to come up with a way to guarantee that the combination of age pension, superannuation and income from private savings ensures a modest standard of living for everyone.
2. Establish a “Cost of a Modest Standard of Living in Retirement” that is kept up-to-date with the real cost of living a healthy life as an active member of the community.
3. Immediately increase single pension from 60% to at least 67% of the couple rate.
4. Increase the pension to 35% of Average Male Weekly Earnings until the new ‘Cost of Living in Retirement’ is implemented.”

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*Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. (Article 25 Universal Declaration of Human Rights of which the Australian Government is a signatory.)