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## **COTA gives Rudd a tick, but awaits final test**

COTA Over 50s has given the Rudd Government a report card that reads “satisfactory after a bumpy start, with occasional highlights, and hopes for continued improvement.”

“Overall, we think the Labor Government has been conscientious in addressing the many challenges facing older Australians”, said COTA Over 50s Executive Director, Dr Geoffrey Bird. “We’re pleased with the bonus boost for pensioners coming their way on December 8. But what we’re especially interested in are the long term outcomes that will emerge from the Harmer review. That will be the acid test for the Government in terms of how seriously it takes its responsibilities towards older Australians.

“The Henry Review outcomes will also be important because the global financial crisis has put enormous pressure on self-funded retirees. We are very concerned that, already, many people who thought they were reasonably well-positioned are struggling to pay bills and maintain their houses. Others seriously doubt their capacity to stay in their own homes.

“In housing policy, the Government has started to turn around years of neglect. The National Rental Affordability Scheme is a good start, but it will only go so far. Much more will be needed. The numbers of older Australians needing affordable rental accommodation, especially single female households, will blow out in the next decade or so. Public housing has got to remain a serious focus for all governments.

“There are several reviews underway in relation to care services, health and hospital reform. These are important preliminary tasks, but we will be judging the Government’s performance on the effectiveness of its responses to those reviews. The recent annual report on aged care shows that there’s still a long way to go before our aged centres are uniformly and consistently delivering the quality of care needed.

“COTA Over 50s wants consumers to be put at the heart of health policy and care services. Older Australians should be entitled to the kind of care and support they need in their homes and in their communities. All governments must focus their attention on community-based services.

“We are delighted with the recent decision by the Attorney-General to remove the ‘dominant reason’ test where older workers are discriminated against because of their age. As the work force shrinks, older workers should be seen as drivers of productivity. They’ve got the experience, the maturity and the reliability that employers, and the economy, need. But it depends largely on their capacity to stay healthy. Also, they are often carers themselves, sandwiched between very old parents and their own children or grandchildren. The rest of this Government’s term will be tough, but we anticipate the best.”

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