MEDIA Release

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It is likely that many more older Australians will experience homelessness unless serious preventative efforts are made to identify and support those at risk of finding themselves on the streets. This is the message contained in the response by COTA Over 50s to the government Green Paper on homelessness *Which Way Home?*

"Many older Australians who become homeless would not have ended up in that situation had timely intervention occurred," said Dr Geoffrey Bird, Executive Director of the peak seniors organisation. "Timely provision of services for low-level support needs is infinitely less costly to both taxpayers and the persons concerned than responding to their needs once they become homeless. Slipping into homelessness produces an unravelling of a person's resources, diminishes resilience, introduces new stresses and compounds existing ones.

"There are definite triggers that can result in homelessness for older Australians. The loss of a partner, elder abuse within the family, poorly managed discharge from hospital, or eviction from a rental property because of redevelopment or a rental price hike are all significant precipitators of homelessness.

"We know that the numbers of older Australians needing rental accommodation will escalate dramatically in coming decades. Without adequate public housing or affordable private rental housing available the likelihood of homelessness rises significantly. We also know that more people are entering retirement with mortgages. You can't pay off a mortgage on limited retirement incomes, and certainly not on a pension. In those circumstances you're at risk of losing your home.

"The Green Paper suggested three options for a revised approach to homelessness. This is a rather restrictive approach to encouraging innovative policy solutions, but COTA Over 50s is nevertheless supportive of the third option. This has a focus on prevention and intervention, with more responsibility being handed to the mainstream services to identify and support people at risk of homelessness, and better linking between the mainstream services and the crisis accommodation services of SAAP.

"The principle of prevention must be a pre-eminent consideration in policy formulation and service-delivery strategies around homelessness."

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