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COTA AUSTRALIA'S FEDERAL ELECTION PLATFORM 2010



TAKING OLDER PEOPLE SERIOUSLY

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COTA Australia - Council on the Ageing - is the national policy arm of the eight State and Territory Councils on the Ageing.

COTA Australia has a focus on national policy issues from the perspective of older people as citizens and consumers and seeks to promote, improve and protect the circumstances and wellbeing of all older people in Australia.

COTA Australia represents the interests of all older Australians and speaks directly for its over 500,000 constituents.

COTA supports initiatives that recognise the capacities and contributions of seniors and actively combat ageism and age discrimination. COTA believes that the impact of ageism, based on negative age stereotypes, restricts the participation and inclusion of older people in all aspects of Australian life. This has adverse effects on the community and on older people. Unfortunately the evidence suggests that ageism is alive and well in Australia.

We believe the initiatives we have singled out for attention would make a significant contribution to promoting the rights of older people to be fully included in our society.

AGEISM AND AGE DISCRIMINATION

There is a need to promote the rights of older people in Australia and to work towards changing community attitudes to reduce and eventually eliminate discrimination against older people.

Establish a Minister for Older Australians

This Ministry would have a whole of government role on older people's issues and should be a cabinet position to ensure the Minister has the ability to influence other portfolios and take matters forward.

The Minister would be supported by a well resourced Office for Older

Persons, situated either in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet or in another social policy portfolio.

This Minister would be responsible for

- A complete review of existing legislation, regulation and policy initiatives to identify age related provisions that need to be removed
- Overseeing the introduction of older persons' impact statements for all new policy initiatives and legislation
- A new five year broad public awareness and education program aimed at promoting positive images of older Australians, making people more aware of ageist attitudes and behaviours and encouraging people to take action to protect the rights of older people.
- Ensuring an active role for older people as users of service in co-designing these services from the beginning.

Establish an Age Discrimination Commissioner in the Australian Human Rights Commission

This position would be similar in scope and responsibilities to the existing Commissioners within the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. The position would take responsibility for promoting understanding of and implementing compliance with the



Age Discrimination Act, and any subsequent piece of discrimination legislation dealing with age issues.

AGED CARE REFORM

COTA is advocating a new aged care system based on the principles espoused in *Leading the Way: A New Vision for the Support and Care of Older Australians* strongly advanced by us and endorsed by the National Aged Care Alliance (NACA).

COTA is seeking commitment to substantial reform of the aged care system. The final reform package will be informed by the outcomes of the Productivity Commission Inquiry into *Caring for Older Australians* which is due to report in April 2011.

However COTA believes some of the key components of the new system must be

- Putting people at the centre of the system and giving them an entitlement to funding for support and care services to meet their needs.
- Giving individual people more choice and control over what support and care is provided, who provides it and when it is provided.
- Much greater emphasis on community care, increasing the quantity of home and community services and the level of funding available to individual people. This would enable older people to achieve their desire to remain

living in their community for longer.

- A sustainable funding formula based on real costs that will ensure high quality aged care into the future - both in terms of funding for services and where the funding comes from.

HEALTH AND OLDER PEOPLE

The April 2010 COAG agreement has laid the foundations of health and hospital reforms and COTA is watching to see how the implementation of those reforms impacts on older people.

COTA has identified four areas that are not adequately dealt with in the COAG reforms that we believe need some urgent attention.

National dental and oral health scheme

COTA is seeking a comprehensive federally funded dental and oral health scheme to address dental and oral health across all age groups. This scheme needs to cover preventative oral health measure including regular checkups, dental therapies including cleaning as well as treatments. Of particular importance for many older people is the inclusion of funding for dentures and denture repairs in any national scheme.

Mental Health

COTA is seeking reform of and significant additional funding for mental health services. This funding and reform should ensure people of all ages are able to access appropriate services when and where they need them, but in light of past experience we seek within this specific provision for older people's services

COTA calls for an urgent national discussion on mental health bringing together the key organisations and professionals to agree on the directions for reform.

The proposed COAG discussions need to take place early in 2011 and should focus on increasing funding to better reflect mental health's share of the health burden in Australia.

Dementia

Dementia is the largest cause of disability burden in older people and a significant contributor to health care costs for this group.

COTA is calling for major additional investment in research into causes of dementia, and support for preventative health measures, in keeping with the levels of support given in recent years to cancer research and prevention.



Health promotion and preventative health for older people

COTA is seeking the establishment of an Older Persons Preventative Health Strategy that focuses on assisting older people to minimise their risk factors for chronic disease.

This would focus on alcohol, tobacco and obesity and would have targeted activities for older people that encouraged them to be more active and reduce alcohol and tobacco consumption.

EMPLOYMENT

Increasing mature aged participation in the workforce is one of the key challenges for the next five years as the population ages and there are increasing labour force shortages.

COTA is seeking the following

- Immediate removal of all existing age barriers for both the Superannuation Guarantee Levy contributions from employers and personal contributions from employees.
- Establishment of an Older Workers' Advisory Service that is a one stop shop for career advice, transition, job placement and so building on the Experience + package that commenced on 1 July this year.
- Funding for a consultancy service to provide skilled people to go into small and medium sized enterprises to assist in a hands on way with job redesign for older workers.

Leading the Way

Our Vision for Support and Care of Older Australians

'Every older Australian is able to live with dignity and independence in a place of their choosing with a choice of appropriate and affordable support and care services as and when they need them.'

This shared vision for the future support and care of all older Australians living with dignity and independence has been adopted by the National Aged Care Alliance, a coalition of the 27 leading consumer, provider and professional associations and unions involved in the provision of care and support for older people.

The challenges and changes needed in aged care have been well documented. Reforms over the last decade have increased the range of services and improved access and quality. However, it is now time for action to substantially change the system and take these reforms to the next level.

We need a reform agenda that transforms aged care in Australia by placing older people at its centre with a choice of timely, accessible and affordable services. In short this vision is built around putting the older person first.