



## MEDIA Release

Wednesday, September 19, 2007

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### ELECTION POLICIES

#### Over 50s – Ageing challenges

At Parliament House today, the Chair of COTA Over 50s National Policy Council, Mrs. Bettine Heathcote, together with The Honorable Christopher Pyne, Minister for Ageing and the Shadow Minister for Ageing, Senator Jan McLucas, launched COTA Over 50s' Election Policies document

“As the 2007 Federal Election approaches, policies need to be reassessed to see whether they are targeting the right issues. A social and economic framework that supports healthy and active ageing reaps benefits for all Australia,” Mrs. Heathcote said.

“COTA Over 50s has highlighted the areas which political leaders need to address in their policy platforms. Additional funding and changed policy settings are needed for enhanced workforce participation, greater economic security, better standards of health and housing, sustainable aged care services and support for those experiencing disadvantage.

“Around 75% of older Australians receive the age pension as their main income. Increasing the aged pension and in particular the single rate pension to 65% of the couple rate, would enable current older, low-income Australian retirees to maintain a modest lifestyle.

“Indigenous seniors continue to suffer a greater burden of ill health than other Australians as their disadvantaged socio-economic predicament impacts on their health. COTA is calling for a National Strategy for Ageing in Indigenous Communities developed and implemented in consultation with indigenous older people and elders.

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“There are about 650,000 adult Australians on waiting lists for free or low-cost dental care (27 months minimum waiting period), creating a national health crisis which is projected to worsen. The National Oral Health Plan 2004-2013 set out timeframes for goals across all community sections but has not achieved targets for older people, despite oral health being vital to maintain health, life quality, nutrition and social interaction. COTA, in collaboration with the Australian Dental Industry Association, has recently presented a report to both political parties – *Economic Analysis of Dental Care for Older Australian*, which calls for a national health care program.

“Depression and mental illness in seniors is often misdiagnosed as dementia but often both can be treated. Mature-aged workers, particularly the long-term unemployed, are also at risk. There is a plan for young people in the Mental Health Strategy but not for older people. COTA is calling for the development and funding of a Mental Health Strategy for Older People.

“Most Australians want to stay in their own home as they age but they may require varying levels of support, such as personal care, transport, housework, respite, meals and home maintenance. There is currently not enough funding or services to support those who need help to stay at home. Older people frequently accept the service they can get rather than being able to influence the type of service that would make the most difference to their lives. A world-class aged care system requires a well-trained workforce with sufficient numbers to meet increasing numbers of residents with complex needs.

“The ageing population is driving enormous change in housing demand. Research is needed to determine the suitability of current housing stock and homes under construction that will be available for the growing numbers of seniors as the population ages. The level and range of public housing is also insufficient and rent assistance is ineffective. A real increase in the supply of affordable housing through a significant Commonwealth contribution to Commonwealth / State Housing Agreements is called for.

“The 2007 Federal Election comes at a crucial time for policy decision-making in response to the ageing of Australia’s population. Action is needed urgently in several policy areas in the next term of government.

“COTA Over 50s is the nation’s leading independent consumer organisation run by and for Australian seniors. Its membership encompasses the peak body Councils on the Ageing in every state and territory and the national Over 50s Association. There are currently more than 6 million people in Australia over 50 years of age.

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