



COTA AUSTRALIA POLICY NEWSLETTER

No. 5 SEPTEMBER 2011

POLICY SPOTLIGHT

Economic Potential of Senior Australians

In March 2011 the Australian Government established the Advisory Panel on the Economic Potential of Senior Australians to look at how we can best use the varied life experiences and intellectual capital of our increasing older population. The three person Panel is Mr Everaldo Compton AM, Professor Gill Lewin and Professor Brian Howe AO supported by a secretariat based in the Treasury.

COTA welcomed the establishment of this Panel as it addresses one of our five key policy principles i.e. to promote positive views of ageing, reject ageism and challenge negative stereotypes. We have long called for a campaign to promote a more positive attitude towards older people and we see the work of the Panel as an important first step in this regard.

COTA supports initiatives that recognise the capacities and contributions of senior Australians and actively combat ageism and age discrimination. COTA Australia 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 broader community as well as older people.

The Panel is conducting series of consultations across the country with key organisations and individuals to get people's views on what are the key issues and most importantly how they might be addressed. To date they have held consultations in Adelaide, Melbourne, Perth, Brisbane and Alice Springs and they will go Sydney, Armidale and Hobart. COTA has been represented at most of the consultations to date and will participate in Sydney and Hobart.

The Panel was given very broad terms of reference covering age discrimination, employment, climate change, preventative health, information technology including the National Broadband Network, volunteering, housing and planning for life transitions. COTA has an interest in all these issues and will be responding to the

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Panel on all of them, drawing on the extensive work done in some of the COTAs on many of these topics. For example COTA Victoria has developed its Green Sages initiative which is about older people being informed and then feeling empowered to take action to reduce the impact of climate change. In NSW and the ACT COTA has been active in the age friendly housing and communities discussions whilst COTA Tasmania through its local COTA champions initiative has been working with older people to encourage them speak up about issue that matter to them.

The Panel released its first report ***realising the economic potential of senior Australians: changing face of society*** in early September in which they identified some key questions across their terms of reference. They have called for submissions in response to this paper by 30 October.

COTA is developing our response to this submission using the work already done in the COTAs, in consultation with members through State Policy councils and other mechanisms.

The Government has not clarified what it intends to do with the wealth of information and ideas that the Panel generates. COTA sees this as an opportunity to identify a range of possible initiatives that the Government could put in place, in both the short and longer-term to ensure older people able to participate fully as citizens and their contribution is acknowledged and valued. We would like to see the Federal Budget for 2012-13 become the Ageing budget, including not only aged care reform but a number of the initiatives coming through this process. More information on the work of the Panel, including the discussion paper can be found at www.epsa.gov.au.

POLICY UPDATES

Age discrimination

COTA welcomes the appointment of Australia's first ever full time Age Discrimination Commissioner and looks forward to working with the Hon Susan Ryan AO in her new role. The Commissioner has agreed to attend the COTA National Policy Council meeting in November which will give us an opportunity to discuss with her ideas on how to combat ageism.

We are participating in the process to consolidate Australia's five Anti discrimination Acts into one

equality Act. We have also put in some comments to the Baseline study for the new National Human Rights Action Plan, highlighting the end to include older people as a vulnerable group that need their human rights protecting.

COTA NSW has also been doing some work around age discrimination in the visual arts.

Aged Care Reform

The final report from the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Caring for Older Australians was released on 8 August. COTA put out a policy alert that indicated our position on the key recommendations. The Government has not yet responded to the report.

COTA is working within the National Aged Care Alliance to develop a sector wide response to the recommendations that will set out a blue print for how to put the framework that the Commission recommends into practice. COTA is also a member of the Minister for Ageing's Ageing Expert Reference Group that he has established to give him industry advice as the government develops its response to the report.

Consumer and Carer Engagement Project

COTA has been funded to support older people have their say about the aged care reform proposed by the Productivity Commissions report Caring for Older Australians.

In its landmark report, released in August, the Productivity Commission makes recommendations to fundamentally change the way aged care services are planned, delivered and funded. Supporting people's independence and providing greater choice and control over the services provided are central principles of the proposed reforms.

COTA will be ensuring older peoples voices are heard as the Federal Government considers its response to the recommendations.

This will be achieved by three different, but linked, streams of action:

1. Supporting the Conversations on Ageing program of the Federal Minister for Mental Health & Ageing, Mark Butler. He is visiting many different parts of Australia to talk directly to older people and hear their views.

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2. COTA consultation and engagement with members and older people on reform. This will occur at state and national level and will include surveys and a range of discussions and forums.
3. Providing a lead support role to the National Aged Care Alliance (NACA) which brings together consumer groups, providers, unions and professional associations. The Minister has nominated NACA as his key consultative body for the reform discussion and negotiations. Ensuring the consumer voice is heard in all of these discussions is critical to successfully reforming aged care services.

The work COTA is undertaking will be important to ensure Government action on aged care – something all stakeholders agree must happen. It is anticipated that the Government will make its response to the report in the 2012 Federal Budget. You can find out more about the reforms proposed and COTAs work on this by visiting www.cota.org.au and follow the links in latest or public policy or by contacting the aged care reform engagement team on (03) 9655 2127

Energy

The key issues in energy for older people continue to be pricing, access, information and consumer protections. As well as continuing advocacy at the local level by state and territory COTAs, COTA Australia continues its advocacy on energy issues through a range of submissions, forums and stakeholder meetings.

As the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) continues its preparations to take control of retail energy markets across most of Australia, COTA has been active in providing formal and informal input into these processes.

Another key emerging issue in energy regulation include proposed changes to the National Electricity Rules and National Gas Rules which aim to slow the skyrocketing growth in network spending – spending which is the key reason for higher energy bills. COTA will work with other consumer groups to support these changes to lessen the impact of higher energy prices.

COTA also continues to represent older Australians on the AER's Consumer Consultative Group and has been working with Federal Government departments on post-Carbon Tax energy efficiency programs.

Carbon Tax

The Federal Government released its anticipated carbon pricing package on 10 July after long negotiations with Greens and Independents through the Multi-Party Climate Change Committee.

The package includes the mechanisms for the price itself, a range of legislative amendments and regulations to implement carbon emissions reductions and, most importantly, compensation for households. The legislation is to be introduced into the Parliament in September.

Starting on 1 July 2012, the initial carbon price of \$23 per tonne of carbon dioxide emissions will increase annually to 2015 when it is replaced by an emissions trading scheme (ETS). Over 50% of the revenue raised through the price on carbon will be handed back to households through the household assistance package.

COTA is pleased that all older Australians of pension age and earning less than \$50,000 for a single or \$95,000 for couples will be better off under the household compensation arrangements. These include increases to pensions and supplements paid to Commonwealth Seniors Health Card holders; tax cuts for those still working and earning; and a Low Income Supplement for vulnerable older people who have retired early.

Single pensioners with no other income will receive an increase of \$338 per year against estimated cost increases of \$204, making them \$134 better off. Couples will receive \$510 to meet additional costs of \$284, putting them \$226 ahead.

Non pensioners who hold a Commonwealth Seniors Health Card will receive the same compensation as pensioners. Most other self-funded retirees will receive assistance through changes to the Pensioner and Senior Australians Tax Offset or an annual tax-free lump sum payment of \$300 through the Low Income Supplement.

COTA believes the household assistance package will adequately compensate older Australians, who also stand to benefit through additional energy efficiency programs.

International Issues

The United Nations has established an Open Ended Working Group to examine the potential for developing

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a UN Convention on the rights of older people. COTA is a member of the International Federation on Ageing (IFA) and Sue Hendy, the CEO of COTA Victoria is on the Board of IFA. Sue, in her role as one of COTAs International Ambassadors joined IFA and other nongovernment organisations at the meeting of the Working Group in New York in August. This was a positive meeting although there is still a long way to go before the convention which COTA and other groups have been calling for some time becomes a reality.

COTA will be working with the Age Discrimination Commissioner and other seniors groups in Australia to increase awareness of the need for a convention and to encourage the Australian Government to support it.

Taxation

COTA will be a participant at the Tax Forum on 4-5 October. In our statement of priorities for the Forum we identified the following areas as our priorities.

- A review of concessions to look at making them more nationally consistent and examining alternative ways to deliver the same level of support
- Measures to improve affordable housing, particularly for people in the private rental market
- Measure to assist lower and middle income earners to increase their retirement incomes through superannuation and other savings measures.

SUBMISSIONS

- Australian Energy Regulator (AER) on the Retail Pricing Information Guidelines
- AER on the Exempt Selling Guideline
- Australian Payments Clearing Association on the Role of Cheques in an Evolving Payments System
- Productivity Commission Inquiry into Caring for Older Australians
- Productivity Commission inquiry into Disability Care and Support
- Statement of Priorities to the Tax Forum 2011

All COTA submissions are at www.cotaaustralia.org.au

In addition COTA has supported the submission from ACCAN to the Review of Access to Telecommunications Services by People With a Disability, Older Australians and People Experiencing Illness and ACCAN's response to the Australian Communications Media Authority's Reconnecting the Customer Draft Report.

COMING UP

October

- 4-5 National Tax Forum, Canberra

Marching to "Fight Dementia"

Alzheimer's Australia Fight Dementia Campaign will seek Federal Government recognition of dementia as a health priority. Action is needed to tackle dementia in the 2012/13 Federal Budget.

You can help Alzheimer's Australia by visiting www.fightdementia.org.au and signing up as a Dementia Champion and joining the Fight Dementia March on 13 October 2011.

Carers Week 2011

– Anyone, anytime can be a carer

Carers Australia and Carers Associations invite all Australians to be part of Carers Week 2011.

Carers Week is Australia's annual celebration of carers and this year will run from Sunday 16 October to Saturday 22 October. Carers Week 2011 aims to raise awareness of carers, the caring role and relationships, and carer supports and services. For further information go to: www.carersaustralia.com.au/carersweek

- 23-27 Ninth Asia/Oceania Regional Congress of Gerontology and Geriatrics 2011, Melbourne
- 27-28 Advisory Panel on the Economic Potential of Senior Australians Consultations, Hobart

November

- 7-8 COTA National Policy Council Meeting, Canberra

December

- 12-13 Older Workers and Work Ability Conference, Monash University, Melbourne

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