

Briefing on the Victorian State Budget 2023-24

COTA Victoria and Seniors Rights Victoria



23 May 2023



Summary

The 2023-24 State Budget was handed down by the Treasurer, Tim Pallas on 23 May 2023. COTA Victoria and Senior Rights Victoria (SRV) have produced this briefing to inform older Victorians and organisations supporting them on:

- What initiatives of direct benefit to older Victorians have been prioritised in the 2023-24 Budget.
- How this investment aligns with priorities identified by COTA Victoria and key gaps needing further consideration.

In our 2023-24 pre-budget submission, we asked the Victorian Government to increase investment in a range of programs to help Victorians age well. Our specific asks were purposely limited and framed around the following four broad areas::

- Listen to older Victorians.
- Meet the needs of Victorians affected by elder abuse.
- Help the health system support older Victorians.
- Ensure older people get the support they need

COTA Victoria is acutely aware that this Budget has been delivered in an environment of harsh financial and social pressure for older people and growing demand for crucial services. These pressures have only increased since we made our pre-Budget submission.

We also recognise the major fiscal challenges facing Victoria and the severe budget constraints for government at this time. While this means that hard choices need to be made, we must ensure that older Victorians doing it tough are not even more disadvantaged by the tightening of government expenditure.

In this context, the Budget provides a number of welcome funding announcements that will help older people, particularly those addressing healthcare, regional aged care, household energy cost relief, elder abuse, and transport infrastructure and community support programs (including COTA Victoria and SRV run programs).

Yet overall, the Budget does not provide the necessary range of responses for older Victorians struggling with the cost-of-living as well as longer term trends in ageing. This is not only a matter of crucial and immediate financial relief but also support that addresses the social and psychological effects of current daily life pressures.

We note the large task to be tackled through the Budget's COVID debt reduction plan over the next 10 years. On the face of it, disadvantaged older Victorians are not directly exposed to key measures in this Plan. However, many will inevitably be impacted, including through public service job cuts and continuing reduced capacity to respond to demand growth for critical services.

COTA Victoria looks forward to seeing further detail on measures presented in the Budget. We want to ensure that the needs of older Victorians are well recognised in the planning and implementation of funded initiatives as well as the impact of the debt reduction plan.

We also look forward to working with government to address priorities that are not funded at this stage but must remain on the agenda for future consideration.

Listen to older Victorians

We asked the Victorian Government to:

- Improve government processes and outcomes for older Victorians through effective evaluation and benchmarking – funding COTA Victoria to develop an older person lived experience engagement framework.
- Increased capacity for non-digital engagement with digitally excluded older people - providing \$1.725m, over three years, to expand COTA Victoria's Information Line.

In the 2023-24 budget, the Victorian Government has committed to:

- Providing a further four years funding for COTA Victoria core programs such as the COTA Wise help line, peer education and community engagement programs.
- Continuing funding for vital local community participation programs such as Neighbourhood Houses.

Our response:

- COTA Victoria is pleased to see the renewal of lapsing funding for some of our core activities. This longer funding term commitment is a welcome indication of the government's commitment to delivering on key supports to older people.
- We call on the Victorian Government to consider growth funding and future investment to fully respond to increasing demand for programs that facilitate earlier engagement into, and earlier prevention of serious issues that older Victorians face within our communities, such as social isolation, elder abuse and chronic health problems.

Meet the needs of Victorians affected by elder abuse

We asked the Victorian Government to:

- Meet increasing demand for elder abuse support and advice, leading to greater prevention, protection and effective redress for older people - providing an additional \$2.55m in annual core funding for Seniors Rights Victoria for the next 3 years.

In the 2023-24 budget, the Victorian Government has committed to:

- Providing total new funding of \$6m over four years for action to address elder abuse (\$1.4m in 2023-24) including continuation of Senior Rights Victoria helpline and individual support services.
- Continuation of the Elder Abuse Prevention Networks.

Our response:

- We appreciate the continued, longer-term funding of elder abuse response and support services through Seniors Rights Victoria.
- At the same time, we call on the Victorian Government to recognise the significant increase in the demand for elder abuse services across the state, including the acknowledgement of a manifestly under-resourced, and stretched Seniors Rights Victoria.
- We call on the Victorian Government to prioritise future investment to support a comprehensive elder abuse prevention strategy including new safeguarding capacity.

Help the health system support older Victorians

We asked the Victorian Government to:

- Improve patient outcomes and reduce acute demand on the health system – by funding COTA Victoria for the creation of an Older Victorian Health and Wellbeing Action Plan.
- Reduce acute care demand through earlier intervention – through the Victorian Government continuing taking a leading role in national primary care reform.
- Implement proven place-based interventions to support older people and reduce acute care need – expanding the Community Paramedics program state-wide.

In the 2023-24 budget, the Victorian Government has committed to:

- Investing in innovative models for primary healthcare including \$20m to trial an expanded role for community pharmacists and \$20m for Priority Primary Health Clinics and \$32m over two years to help boost GP training and availability in metropolitan and regional centres.

- Providing \$41.2m over three years for better services for older people in aged care settings including meeting nurse-patient ratios and the Residential in Reach program to avoid hospital admission for aged care residents.
- A total of \$162m in infrastructure funding over four years for three new public sector facilities in regional Victoria.
- Funding under the Disability State Plan for Disability Liaison Officers to help people with disabilities access appropriate health care.

Our response:

- We welcome the commitment to expanded aged care in regional Victoria and for continuing effort to improve care across the public residential aged care system.
- We appreciate the modest investments in new models for primary health care but call on the Victorian Government to prioritise future investment in more specifically targeted initiatives to address access issues for older people, including chronic condition management and community paramedic services.

Ensure older Victorians get the support they need

We asked the Victorian Government to:

- Increase access to support by growing demographics - delivering key recommendations of the final report from the 'Inquiry into support for older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds'.
- Improve reach and outcomes for energy price support – by funding COTA Victoria to deliver older-person specific community outreach to increase older person participation in the \$250 Power Saving Bonus
- Increase older people's economic participation in society – by funding COTA Victoria to deliver a state-wide scheme for place-based re-skilling programs targeted at Victorians over 50.

In the 2023-24 budget, the Victorian Government has committed to:

- A total of \$400m for a fourth round of the Power Saving Bonus program providing another \$250 to households that use the website to search for the cheapest electricity deal.
- Providing \$7.5m over 2 years to support community participation programs that are critical to many older Victorians, including support for organisations that coordinate volunteering, food relief and to assist

community and philanthropic organisations.

- A further \$90m to support digitalisation of government services to improve and streamline access, including a Digital Seniors Card to be added in coming months.

Our response:

- We welcome the extension of the Power Saver Bonus and renew our call on the Victorian Government to support efforts to help older digitally excluded people from accessing this offer.
- We look forward to seeing more detail on support for community and philanthropic organisations and urge government to see disadvantaged and marginalised older Victorians as a specific focus.

Other Budget measures impacting older Victorians include:

In addition to the specific initiatives highlighted above, a number of other measures in the State Budget will provide important benefits to older Victorians.

A selection of these that align with COTA Victoria's broad priorities include:

- A headline figure of \$4.9b over 4 years for health system growth and enhancement, including \$320m for 7 new or upgraded hospitals and \$960m to improve facilities for patients.
- A \$247m investment to hire more paramedics and continue Victoria's Virtual Emergency Department diverting people from long waits at hospitals.
- Further implementation of the plan to rebuild Victoria's mental health system including three more Mental Health and Wellbeing Local facilities.
- \$10.5m over two years to strengthen the Multipurpose Taxi program to respond to increasing demand from wheelchair users, and \$12.9 over three years to deliver on Victoria's Bus Plan.
- \$190m for fairer regional transport fares, capping prices to metropolitan fares.
- \$35m over two years for expansion of Jobs Victoria Mentoring and initiatives such as Ready Set to help prepare disadvantaged job seekers for the workforce – which we would expect to include older people returning to the workforce.
- \$4.5m over two years to trial the LGBTIQ+ Pride in Ageing initiative to better support older LGBTIQ+ Victorians and strengthen their connections to community.

COTA Victoria & Seniors Rights Victoria taking action

The relatively small number of new initiatives specifically targeting older Victorians in the Budget, and lack of clear focus on older people as an overall priority, is disappointing. This makes it all the more important for organisations such as COTA Victoria and Senior Rights Victoria to step up and work with government to support older people over the coming year and into the future.

In this context, we are grateful to the continuing funding provided to our organisation by both the Victorian and Federal governments. This is vital to our capacity to contribute to the positive ageing agenda.

We will continue to engage with older Victorians and energetically advocate to government about needs identified in the Ageing Well Action Plan 2022-2026. We will focus on identifying the most effective and efficient ways to provide critical supports – through both new and existing programs.

As an immediate response, COTA Victoria will launch its new “Older Not Alone” campaign in early June 2023. This campaign – delivered in cooperation with the Municipal Association of Victoria and the Victorian Government - highlights the extensive range of resources and supports currently available to older Victorians. A key aim is to improve knowledge of and access to such support so that no older person is excluded.

About us

Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victoria is the leading not-for-profit organisation representing the interests and rights of people aged over 50 in Victoria. For over 70 years, we have led government, corporate and community thinking about the positive aspects of ageing in the state.

Seniors Rights Victoria (SRV) is a program of COTA Victoria and the key state-wide service dedicated to advancing the rights of older people and the early intervention into, or prevention of, elder abuse in our community.

COTA Victoria and Seniors Rights Victoria acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work. We pay respect to elders past and present and those who continue the journey. We recognise the rich Indigenous heritage and culture of this country.

For further information

Steve Wright

Marketing & Communications Manager

Phone: 03 9655 2159

Email: swright@cotavic.org.au



COTA Victoria & Seniors Rights Victoria

Level 2, Suite 2.5, 424 St Kilda Road
Melbourne VIC 3004

cotavic.org.au | seniorsrights.org.au