Promoting opportunities. Protecting rights. For older Victorians.

Portfolio summary: Cost of living

What is the issue?

Many older Victorians are experiencing increasing cost-of-living pressures, particularly those on low or fixed incomes who rely on pensions, government payments, or limited retirement savings.

Rising costs across housing, energy, food, transport, healthcare and insurance are placing significant pressure on household budgets. These pressures are driven by both long-term structural inequality and short-term economic shocks, including inflation and rapid increases in utility and living costs.

Some older people face additional financial vulnerability due to insecure housing, declining health, caring responsibilities, workforce exclusion, widowhood, or experiences of elder abuse. Many have limited capacity to absorb unexpected expenses or recover financially from major life events.

Government supports, concessions, consumer protections and hardship systems play a critical role in helping older Victorians maintain financial security, independence and participation in community life.

Key facts

- Nearly one in four retired Australians over 65 have incomes below the poverty line (defined as 50% of median household disposable income). This compares poorly with countries such as France (4.4%), New Zealand (10.6%), and Canada (12.3%).[i]
- Women over 55 are one of the fastest-growing cohorts experiencing homelessness, with 240,000 across Australia at risk and many more facing long-term housing stress.[ii]
- The last decade saw a 77% increase in older Victorians renting privately in Victoria. A quarter of these older renters are on very low incomes.[iii] 80% of Australia's single, retired women who rent, live below the poverty line.[iv]
- 19% of Victorians over 50 reported having unpaid household bills due to incapacity to pay. The largest single type of unpaid bill is electricity/gas at 11%, with 9% unable to pay their council rates and 7% unable to pay internet or mobile phone bills.[v]

Our advocacy agenda

Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victoria and Seniors Rights Victoria advocates for policies and supports that enable older Victorians to live with dignity, financial security and independence.

We advocate for:

- adequate and accessible concessions, subsidies and income supports;
- simpler, more integrated and more automatic concession systems;
- stronger consumer protections and fairer hardship responses across essential service sectors;
- affordable housing, energy and healthcare for older people;
- targeted support for groups experiencing heightened financial vulnerability, including older women, carers, people with disability, First Nations communities, migrant communities, and those affected by family violence or elder abuse; and
- policies that support workforce participation, financial wellbeing and economic security across later life.

We also advocate for stronger recognition of the relationship between financial hardship, social exclusion and elder abuse.

Recent COTA Victoria documents

Recent examples of our work on cost of living and economic security include:

- Report on Older Women's Economic Security
- Submission on guidelines for payment of municipal rates
- Submission: Energy Retail Code of Conduct (Nov 2024)
- Submission: Energy Retail Code of Conduct Stage 2 (Apr 2026)
- Member briefing: Victorian Housing Statement
- Submission: Consumer Affairs Victorian Funded Services (Nov 2024)

Ongoing research, policy development, and advocacy remains underway in the space of cost-of-living, including:

- in-depth investigation, collaboration and agenda setting in relation to women's economic security;
- input to consumer practice reviews and price setting mechanisms in the Victorian utilities sector;
- submissions on a wide range of reviews involving consumer payment issues, including hardship policies and practices; and,
- ongoing advocacy to support affordability as part of our State Budget and Election platforms.

Feedback on any issue raised in this briefing can be provided through our policy advocacy survey tool accessible at: COTA Victoria Policy Advocacy - Feedback on Publications – Fill out form.

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[i] Pensions at a Glance 2021 : OECD and G20 Indicators (https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/ca401ebden/1/3/6/5/index.html)
[ii] Emma Power, University of Western Sydney, Older Women in the Private Rental Sector: Unaffordable, Substandard and Insecure Housing (2020) https://www.oldertenants.org.au/content/older-women-the-private-rental-sector-unaffordable-substandard-and-insecure-housing
[iii] W. Stone et al, *Ageing in a Housing Crisis: Older people's housing insecurity & homelessness in Australia* (commissioned by Housing for the Aged Action Group), 2023 https://www.oldertenants.org.au/sites/default/files/decades_of_decline_2011-21_victoria.pdf
[iv] B Coates et al, *Renting in retirement: Why Rent Assistance needs to rise,* Grattan Institute, 2025 https://grattan.edu.au/report/renting-in-retirement-why-rent-assistance-needs-to-rise/
[v] Ibid