



*years of supporting
older Tasmanians*

T A S M A N I A

an Age-Friendly State

ELECTION STATEMENT
COUNCIL ON THE AGEING TASMANIA

TASMANIA

an Age-Friendly State

COTA Tasmania (Council on the Ageing [Tas] Inc) is the peak body committed to encouraging our community to think positively about ageing. With **40.4% of Tasmanians over the age of 50** (Census 2021), this cohort is impacted by a range of factors for which COTA seeks government commitment.

Older Tasmanians deserve to be heard and afforded equity of services, opportunities, and representation. We can expect to live longer, healthier lives and we all have a role to play in making decisions that will support us age well. Many inequalities experienced by Tasmanians do not end as people age, indeed in many cases they increase.

In our 2024-2025 Budget submission, we encouraged the Government to consider proactive measures to assist Tasmanians plan and feel connected and empowered to age well with support and services that meet their needs and value their lived experiences.

COTA is calling on all parties and candidates to commit to recognising, valuing and supporting older people in our communities and to consider their unique needs this election campaign.

Whilst there are many policy areas relating to older people funded by the Commonwealth, there are measures and initiatives that State Government can undertake, especially in the prevention and social connection spaces, that will assist people to maintain good health and wellbeing as they age.

“ *Growing old is wonderful! Ageing is wonderful. Every wrinkle and grey hair should be a sign of a life well lived.* ”

COTA Tasmania’s seven priority areas:

- 1 Peak body sustainability
- 2 Digital literacy and inclusion
- 3 Housing support
- 4 Social connection
- 5 Cost of living
- 6 Health and wellbeing
- 7 Reframe ageing

We encourage the incoming Government to sign up to the **WHO Age-friendly Cities and Communities Network**, which will reflect a ‘*commitment to listen to the needs of their ageing population, assess and monitor their age-friendliness and work collaboratively with older people and across sectors to create age-friendly physical and social environments*’.

Quotes throughout this document come from our H.E.A.R Consultation (2022), State of the Older Nation Report (2023), Attitudes to Ageing Survey (2021) and 2023 Seniors Week events.



We ask all parties and candidates at this election to commit to the following priority areas:

1 Peak body sustainability

COTA has not seen an increase to existing funding grants for several years, absorbing the additional costs of managing the organisation without appropriate indexation. Additional funding will support COTA Tasmania to increase representation, consultation, events, information dissemination and policy responses. It would enable our programs and workshops to be delivered to a wider audience across the State and capability to print and distribute printed collateral.

Tasmanians need:

- **Peak body funding guaranteed five years for COTA Tasmania.** The current funding received is inadequate to reduce the gap between funding received and the rising costs of advocating for and providing services and programs to older people in our community.
- Increased funding will **enable adequate staffing levels across the State**, additional staffing roles (Policy Officer and Mature Age Workforce) and support expanding existing programs and projects.
- **Indexation commitment.** We recommend the Government adopt the 70% WPI/30%(CPI) (wages to CPI) split in organisational costs, plus the superannuation guarantee. We request indexation commitment on **ALL** our funding grants.

2 Digital literacy and inclusion

Tasmania has the second lowest digital literacy skills level in the country (Score of 70, ADII 2023). People over 75 years of age continue to experience higher levels of digital exclusion and with rapid changes to technology capabilities, programs to support and address these inequalities are now more important than ever.

“ *How do you know what groups you can join and be encouraged to do so? Many people don't have access or knowledge to find information online.* ”

Tasmanians need:

- Commitment to **provide phone details** for all Government services.
- **Increased digital inclusion strategies** to ensure no older Tasmanian is left without support.
- **Ongoing funding support for Online Access Centres** in rural /regional areas to help older people navigate online processes.
- Improved resources for **Libraries Tasmania to further embed digital support for seniors**, with consideration for an intergenerational digital mentoring program via DEYCP designed and embedded into curriculum statewide.
- Radio, print and TV **awareness campaign** to raise the profile of above services.

“ *Older people who are digitally literate need to be employed (and paid) to teach older people – we need to be digitally literate! But, we need to be taught by people who understand what older people don't understand.* ”



3 Housing support

Lack of appropriate housing for Tasmanians as they age is still a significant problem, with housing stock not fit for purpose with appropriate equipment supports to enable people to live independently and stay in their homes. We continue to be concerned about the vulnerability of older Tasmanians living in private rental arrangements and the availability of age-appropriate housing, both in key centres and in regional areas.

“ How to find a rental on single pension?

Tasmanians need:

- **Commitment to increasing housing stock across the State.**
- Development of an **appropriate housing solution for Tasmanians escaping elder abuse.**
- Increased **targeted accommodation options for Tasmanians over 50 years** across the State with a focus on supporting older women.
- Innovative approaches to address the needs of older Tasmanians in the private rental market, **introducing incentives for landlords to modify properties** to support ageing in place.
- Exploration of **intergenerational shared accommodation models** as a way of supporting both older and younger Tasmanians to maintain suitable housing alongside reducing social isolation.

“ *More affordable rental accommodation is desperately needed, especially safe accommodation for single women, such as myself.*

4 Social connection

Human beings are social creatures, our connection to others helps us to survive and thrive, especially when things become more difficult. The Ending Loneliness State of the Nation report 2023 showed loneliness to impact one in six Australians, with those who are lonely 5.2 times more likely to have poorer wellbeing as a result.

Connecting with new people and groups as you age is often harder due to mobility and health issues impacting confidence, lack of suitable transport options, limited family networks nearby and difficulties knowing where to find out about local activities and groups. Investing in social connection programs and supports alongside ensuring clear and accessible information of these are available will be vital in minimising further social isolation amongst older Tasmanians.

“ *Location-specific social prescribing should be promoted to general practitioners as an appropriate intervention for older people experiencing mental health difficulties.*



5 Cost of living

Tasmanians need:

- Funding for a new yearly **Social Connection grants program** (\$200k annually) with an intergenerational focus, providing opportunities for shared learning, connection and friendship across the ages. Several jurisdictions offer such programs, with QLD Government recently increasing their commitment to over \$30 million in this space.
- **Increased funding to ensure the annual Seniors Week** program offers diverse activities, events and collaborations and that Tasmanians are aware of and can connect with the program.
- **Seniors Week grant program** (\$20k) to assist community groups to hold activities, aligned with other Tasmanian 'weeks'.
- **Free Transport for Seniors** to ease the cost burden and support people to connect with one another. Committed investment in transport infrastructure and workforce development.
- **Commit to exploring social prescribing initiatives** as part of the the next Strategy for Older People 2024-2029 and associated Action Plans.

“ *We need more intergenerational activity for sharing of skills and knowledge.* ”

“ *Public transport is woeful and much too expensive and traffic congestion is becoming a serious factor.* ”

Tasmanians are doing it tough. Many older people on fixed incomes are stretched financially and feeling the pressures of increased costs with limited ability to generate further income. This means people are going without as well as disconnecting from their communities due to financial pressures.

“ *Cost of living is adding to already stressful situations for many in the community.* ”

Tasmanians need:

- The **Ticket to Play Program to be extended to adults** across Tasmania supporting them to maintain both physical fitness alongside providing social connection and creating an effective preventative health policy initiative. We should provide the same opportunities for cost-of-living relief and healthy activity, no matter the age of the recipient.
- **Energy considerations** – sustainable solutions which really deliver for communities and put a brake on what will be ever increasing and more regressive energy costs, with a much stronger consumer focus at the regulator end.
- Make the **energy regulator truly independent**, removing it from Treasury and establishing it as a independent price commission with consumer representation.
- Support initiatives to **improve energy literacy**, including areas of energy efficiency to increase understanding of how to make the most of time-of-use pricing.
- **Free Public Transport for Seniors**, on all routes and travel modalities.
- **Maintain taxi rebates** for concession cardholders.



6 Health and wellbeing

“ *Consistent health support is needed – there are long wait lists for allied healthcare, inconsistent GPs and appointments are too short.*

Consistent, available, and timely GP support is of increasing importance to older Tasmanians. Building this relationship greatly enhances the ability to undertake preventative health measures alongside monitoring emotional and psychological wellbeing. The out-of-pocket cost as well as lengthy wait times means older Tasmanians are missing out on adequate health care. We have a shortage of allied health professionals, specifically occupational therapists, that can support and assist Tasmanians to adapt their daily living tasks to maintain safety and independence around the home.

“ *As a former aged care nurse, I believe that age is no barrier to a good life, unfortunately we don't have the infrastructure and services available to ensure our older people can remain independent for as long as possible; especially in regional and rural areas, especially in terms of in home palliative care.*

Social isolation can lead to low mood and depression and a higher risk of self-harm ideation, with men over 85 years now having the highest age rates of suicide in Australia. Suicide prevention in older adults should therefore aim to improve help-seeking behaviours and reduce stigma around mental wellbeing.

Tasmanians need:

- **Increased investment in primary health care services**, specifically GP and occupational therapy services.
- Support and advocate for a **Seniors Dental Benefit Scheme** – poor dental hygiene can impact levels of social isolation, as well as the increased risk of diabetes, heart disease and chronic malnutrition. Older Australians need access to quality, affordable dental care that will keep them healthier for longer.
- **Increases to funding for simple modifications and equipment** that support older Tasmanians living at home.
- **Mental Health supports for older Tasmanians** – fund a campaign to increase health literacy and combat ageist stereotypes about ageing and mental health. Commit to continue investing in the Older Persons Mental Health reforms.
- **Commit to re-fund the COTA Tasmania Living Longer Living Stronger program**, a personalised program for older Tasmanians offering safe, accessible and effective strength and balance sessions by training local gym instructors and personal trainers. It improves health outcomes, fitness and quality of life for older people through affordable exercise delivered sustainably in local communities.

“ *Allied health – long wait lists for simple adaptations can create bigger issues in longer term.*

“ *Mental health stigma and discrimination reduction strategies should include a focus on reducing ageism and the stigma of mental illness in older adults.*



7 Reframe ageing

“ *I don't like being called 'old' or 'aged' or treated differently purely on my D.O.B.*

There is a need for greater awareness and valuing of older Tasmanians. We need to talk about ageing, to value the ageing journey and to plan for it in a proactive way, whilst challenging ageism and its impacts on people's social, emotional and economic wellbeing. When we embrace the ageing journey, indicators of health and wellbeing will improve as communities become more accessible and connected.

“ *Society increasingly values people purely and primarily on the way they look while valuable contributions are largely ignored. There is so much pressure to not look your age; especially once you're over 45.*

Tasmanians need:

- A commitment to **resource and finalise the next Older Tasmanian Strategy 2024-2029** with associated Action Plans and commitment from whole-of-government to invest resources to support initiatives within these. The current strategy expired end of 2022.
- Commitment to establish an **Ageing in Tasmania Advisory Committee**, providing valuable lived experience and maintaining connection to the specific issues experienced by older Tasmanians. This group would also support the review of the Action Plans against the 2024-2029 strategy for Older Tasmanians.
- Ensure **data collection, analysis and reporting of data** undertaken by Government separates the over 60-year cohort to **recognise the diversity of need at different ages**.

- Support COTA to expand its **Ageism Awareness workshops** and commit to including age diversity training in all Government induction programs.
- Commit to developing a **Mature Age Jobs Strategy** consultation, to explore and support adults into work and training opportunities, resourced in a similar manner to the current *Youth Jobs Strategy*. We should provide the same opportunities for employment and business support towards workforce participation, no matter the age of the job seeker.
- Ensure any **new policies and legislation developed address discrimination and inequality** based on age, ensuring the human rights of older Tasmanians are protected.

“ *People are overlooked as overqualified and not provided opportunities because of their age.*

COTA Tasmania is seeking your support in making seniors in our communities a priority as we head to March 23 2024.

For further information see our Budget Priorities' Statement here: cotatas.org.au/policy-advocacy/cota-submissions/

To discuss this Election Statement, please contact: Acting CEO, Brigid Wilkinson
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About COTA Tasmania

COTA Tasmania has been the voice of older Tasmanians for 60 years.

Our Vision: Ageing in Australia is a time of possibility, opportunity, and influence.

Our Mission: We advance the rights, interests, and futures of Australians as we age.

Our Values

- **Respect:** We respect and value the contribution and lived experience of Australians as they age and support each person's right to make choices and to participate in their community.
- **Diversity:** We value the great diversity that characterises Australians of all ages and are committed to genuine exchange and engagement with all older people in Australia.
- **Collaboration:** We communicate and work collaboratively with older people, with each other, with our partners, and with the Australian community to achieve the vision and mission of COTA.
- **Integrity:** We operate accountably, ethically, honestly, and openly, and strive for excellence in all our interactions.

