



Now is the time

COTA NSW Policy Platform 2019



COTA NSW

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Executive summary

The people of NSW are living longer, healthier lives. The challenges and opportunities this presents impact on us all – we all want our parents and ourselves to get the most out of life at every stage.

For older Australians to flourish, we need to ensure that supports and systems are in place. As the 2019 state election approaches, COTA NSW is highlighting the strategic investments that will make it happen.

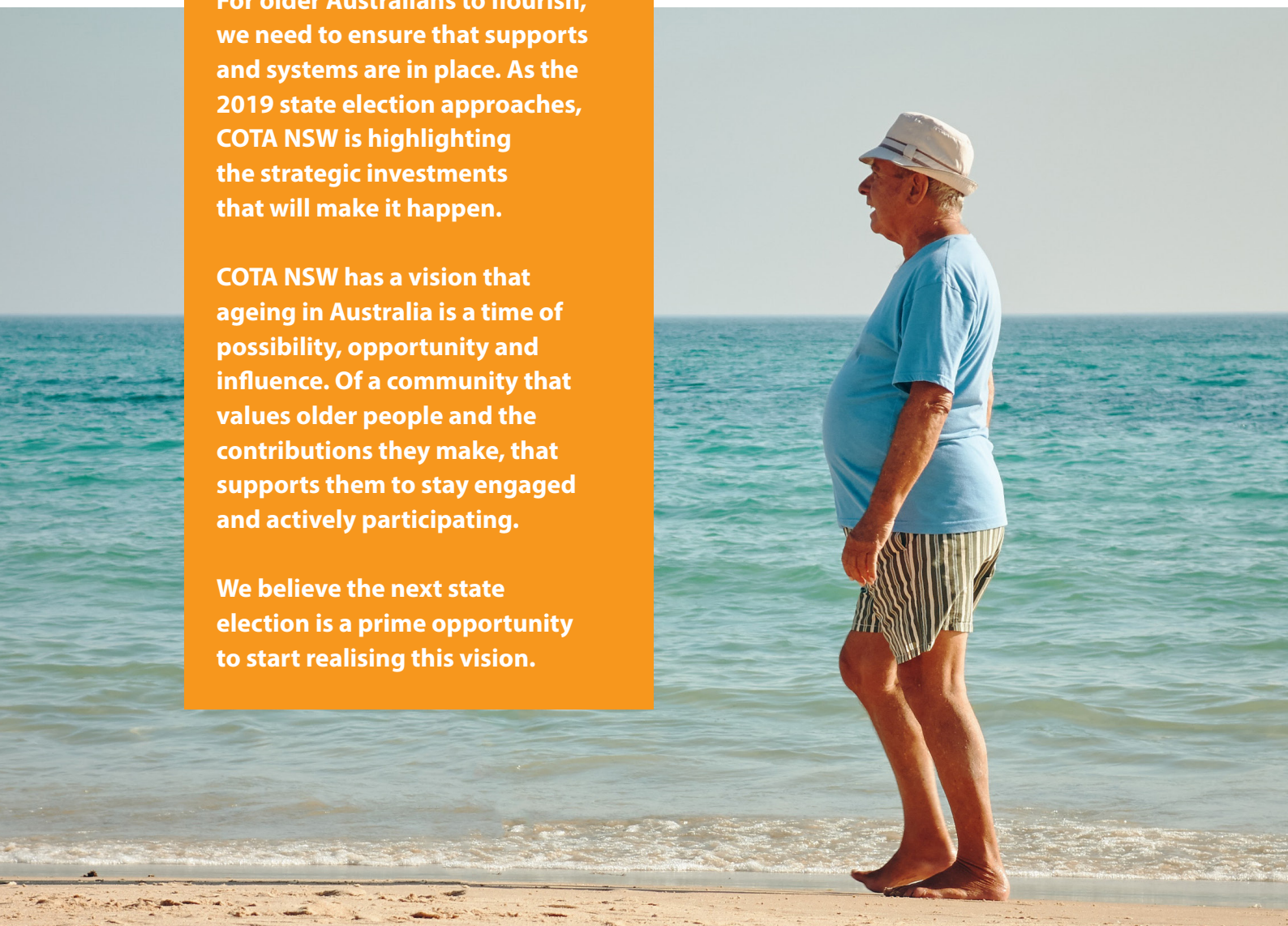
COTA NSW has a vision that ageing in Australia is a time of possibility, opportunity and influence. Of a community that values older people and the contributions they make, that supports them to stay engaged and actively participating.

We believe the next state election is a prime opportunity to start realising this vision.

Those aged 50+
make up

44%

of eligible
voters in NSW



Executive summary

Our position is informed by a statewide consultation of people aged 50 or older. The initiatives herein accurately reflect the things older people in NSW want, underpinned by five core principles:



A health system that encourages and supports older people to stay fit and healthy, so they get to enjoy the time with their friends and family.



A job market that values older workers for their knowledge and experience, and workplace structures that support their participation.



Housing that is affordable, suitable for their needs and in the community they choose to live in, regardless of whether they are renting or able to purchase.



A range of transport options that support older people to be active participants in their communities, regardless of where they live and whether they can drive.



Communities that are inclusive of all their citizens – through their planning processes, and understanding the needs of the people living there.

Executive summary

For decades, Governments have been warning Australians about the economic affect of ageing communities: the cost of aged care, the increases in health spending, and the reduction in the number of people of working age to foot the bill.

But older people are now healthier than they have ever been – they not only live longer than the generations before them, they live longer without disability or sickness.

They are not a burden. They are important contributors to their families and communities.

In 2012, the responsibility for Aged Care moved to the Commonwealth Government. However, responsibility for healthy ageing remains with the State Government. In response, NSW launched its first Ageing Strategy in 2012, and revised the document in 2016.

A whole of Government strategy, it talks about including older people, and supporting them to age well.

And it should. Because the things that state governments do make a difference to older people, and the communities they live in.

If we are to leverage the opportunities presented by ageing Australians, we must embrace the challenges they present. The time to act is now.

A comprehensive engagement report on COTA NSW's Consumer Reference Groups is available on our website, or by request.



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Our Priorities

COTA NSW's State Election Platform 2019 outlines key priorities and actions from the five themes of the NSW Ageing Strategy 2016-2020.

To ensure that NSW is the best place for older people to live, COTA NSW calls on the next NSW state government to:

Ensure high level co-ordination of the NSW Ageing Strategy by transferring responsibility to the Department of Premier and Cabinet.



Health and wellbeing

Invest and implement a range of preventative measures to improve older people's health and wellbeing in NSW.

- Allocate funds for the development and implementation of diverse, scalable free or low-cost programs that offer a range of exercise options for older people as they age.
- Fund the expansion of NSW Health's Hospital in the Home (HITH) program and Clinical Nurse Specialist positions, with a focus on regional and rural areas with ageing populations.

Our Priorities



Working and retiring

Promote and actively support the increased workforce participation of older people in NSW.

- Exclude employees over 50 from reportable Payroll Tax paid by employers.
- Expand the NSW Department of Industry Business Connect program to develop resources and hire specialist consultants that can provide assistance to small and medium business to create flexible workplace policies and practices for older workers.
- Amend the NSW Government Procurement Policy Framework to require new contracts (awarded to medium and large companies) to develop HR strategies for older workers and to report annually against these commitments.

Our Priorities



Housing choices

Provide a range of affordable, appropriate and accessible housing choices for older people in NSW.

Renters

- Decrease the eligibility age from 80 to 67 for inclusion on the NSW Housing priority waiting list for public housing.
- Set standards to include an annual target of 75% of new social and affordable housing dwellings designed to a minimum Gold Livable Housing standard.
- Fund the establishment of a state-wide older people's housing information and support service to bring together fragmented resources and reduce the risk of homelessness.

Home Owners

- Reduction in stamp duty for people 70+ purchasing owner occupier properties that have been built to Gold Liveable Housing standard.
- Create a legislative and regulatory environment that supports innovative housing models which allow older people to choose where they live.

Our Priorities



Getting around

Provide public infrastructure that enables the social and economic participation of older people in NSW.

- Double annual funding to the Accessible Transport Program to \$266 million to expedite the completion of train station accessibility upgrades.
- Create an Active Transport Infrastructure Commissioner responsible for ensuring that planning for all new and existing community residential developments pay attention to active transport infrastructure, particularly footpaths.
- Provide funding to local councils to improve access to transport and shopping precincts by upgrading unsafe footpaths and streets and other impediments to safe access.

Our Priorities



Inclusive communities

Implement policies and programs that facilitate an inclusive and connected community.

- Provide and promote information in a range of accessible formats and languages to older people in NSW.
- Reinstate funding for Sector Support Officers to support the implementation of the NSW Ageing Strategy through community development initiatives, realisation of local ageing strategies and capacity building of service providers.
- Provide recurrent funding (3-5 year funding period) for community-based social support programs that target isolated and vulnerable older people experiencing loneliness.



Health and wellbeing



Older people want to remain independent in their own homes and continue to engage with their communities. The best way to achieve this is to provide the support that enables older people to maintain and improve their physical and mental health as they age.

Prevention and early intervention measures can have a great impact on quality of life and life expectancy. In addition, these measures can decrease the burden on the health care system, increase social participation and maintain a healthier workforce that will boost economic performance and productivity.

Increased investment and commitment to introducing long-term prevention strategies for improved health outcomes is needed across the life course, with a customised approach for older individuals and groups.

These preventative strategies range from the subsidisation of appropriate group exercise classes, to the promotion and availability of mental health services for older people, to the expansion of specialist hospital programs that provide out-patient care to prevent the future need for hospitalisation.

How do you find a gym that will cater for older people? We need professionals who understand our needs with regards to flexibility and strength training. Local gyms do not cater to or understand this at all. Yoga, Pilates are almost impossible to find in Blacktown for older people.

Health and wellbeing

Maintaining physical activity and a healthy diet are essential components of ageing well and remaining independent. Despite this, the rates of overweight and obese people aged 50 and over continues to increase. Only 30% of older people undertake adequate exercise and 9/10 don't consume the recommended servings of vegetables. Population based improvements in these health determinants would result in demonstrable reductions of lifestyle related preventable diseases such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease and associated health costs. Feedback from the participants from the CRG's indicated that cost was a key factor in the involvement of group-based exercise classes. There was broad consensus that promotion was needed in traditional formats as many attendees were not aware of the exercise options that were available to them in their suburb or town.

“If government wants to ease population growth in Sydney they need to provide more health services such as adequate hospitals in regional areas then maybe more people our age would consider moving.”

The ability to access a range of health services, but particularly specialist practitioners was of critical importance to our regional and rural CRG attendees. Many of these regional and rural communities are ageing, with coastal towns also attracting large numbers of older people retiring there for a “sea change”. This demographic shift requires a range of medical services that cater for the health needs of increased numbers of older people. COTA NSW calls for innovative programs such as NSW Health's Hospital in the Home (HITH) to be expanded across the state. This program allows for a range of conditions to be clinically treated in the patient's home and in many cases prevents the need for hospital admission and a reduction in the risks associated with this.

As the proportions of older people in regional areas increase, the demand for additional medical supports for a range of conditions – such as Dementia, Parkinson's and Cancer – will also increase. There is a clear need for additional resourcing for a range of specialist positions. COTA NSW calls for an increase Clinical Nurse Specialists positions to be expanded across the state, with a focus on regional areas. This will allow for an increase in treatment options that are more cost effective and with better health outcomes for older patients.

Health and wellbeing

We recommend:

Invest and implement a range of preventative measures to improve older people's health and wellbeing in NSW.

- Allocate funds for the development and implementation of diverse, scalable free or low-cost programs that offer a range of exercise options for older people as they age.
- Fund the expansion of NSW Health's Hospital in the Home (HITH) program and Clinical Nurse Specialist positions, with a focus on regional and rural areas with ageing populations.



Working and retiring



For most people, the benefits of employment extend beyond financial security. The workplace provides opportunities for social interaction and establishing a sense of purpose and belonging. Work provides intellectual stimulation and encourages continued independence and social engagement, which in turn helps to mitigate a range of risk factors such as social isolation and cognitive decline.

Increasing numbers of older people are remaining in the work force and deferring 'retirement'. However, some older people are facing discriminatory attitudes that inhibit their ability to find employment using their skills and experience. Others encounter resistance from employers when seeking job flexibility to enable transition to retirement or to fulfil family caring responsibilities.

A succession of governments have identified the challenges faced by older workers and the importance to the economy and their continued workforce participation. However, little has been done of significance to alter the underemployment, unemployment and age discrimination for many older workers. The Golden Age Index 2018 (PWC) lists Australia as

I would like to have a little paid, part-time work for maybe one day per week, but I am considered too old although I am experienced, capable and reliable.

Working and retiring

17 out of 35 OECD countries for the economic prospects of older workers. The proposed introduction of payroll tax exemptions for employment of older workers and the subsequent reduction in tax revenue would be offset by the incentive to employ older workers and increase in workforce participation and GDP. It is estimated that an increase in employment for people aged 55 and over to New Zealand levels of workforce participation could deliver a 7.6% long-term rise in GDP¹.

COTA NSW calls for an expansion to the NSW Department of Industry Connect program to provide resources and expertise for small and medium businesses to implement improved recruitment practices and human resources policies that understand the different needs of older workers, such as flexible working arrangements, training or mentoring opportunities.

As one of the largest employers in the state, the NSW Government is uniquely placed to become an employer of choice for older workers and to influence the recruitment practices of other organisations through its procurement policies. Additionally, COTA NSW calls for a modification of the NSW Government Procurement Policy Framework to require new contracts – awarded to medium and large companies – to develop human resource strategies for older workers and to report annually against mandatory indicators.

I have been underemployed as I get older. I had a long and successful career in IT and have recently moved from Sydney to Newcastle but have struggled to find work. No one wants to hire me because I'm too old.

¹ PWC (2018) The Golden Age Index.

Working and retiring

We recommend:

Promote and actively support the increased workforce participation of older people in NSW.

- Exclude employees over 50 from reportable Payroll Tax paid by employers.
- Expand the NSW Department of Industry Business Connect program to develop resources and hire specialist consultants that can provide assistance to small and medium business to create flexible workplace policies and practices for older workers.
- Amend the NSW Government Procurement Policy Framework to require new contracts (awarded to medium and large companies) to develop HR strategies for older workers and to report annually against these commitments.



Housing choices



COTA NSW supports the right of all older people to have access to housing that is affordable, accessible, adaptable and stable that will enable people to remain independent in their own homes and communities. Ageing in place allows older people to remain socially connected, access existing social networks and utilise familiar services.

Housing affordability in NSW is consistently raised as a pivotal issue by older people around NSW. Increasing numbers are retiring with mortgages, and for those that do not own their own home, the private rental market is usually their only option given the long waiting lists for social and community housing.

The precarious nature and high cost of private rental is particularly detrimental to older single women, the largest growing group of homeless people in Australia. Lack of affordable housing leads to financial insecurity and sacrifices being made in other areas, such as food, medication and healthcare.

I am 82 years old and have been on the public housing waiting list for 5 years, I have not been able to find affordable rentals. I have had to rely on relatives for somewhere to stay. I don't know how long this will last.

Housing choices

The waiting list for public housing in NSW now surpasses 55,000 people. COTA NSW acknowledges that current levels of social housing are inadequate to meet a growing need. Given the ageing of the population and increasing need for social housing, COTA NSW strongly supports a reduction in the age from 80 to 67 for prioritisation on the NSW Housing public housing waiting lists and subsequently reduce the time that vulnerable older people will have to wait for secure housing.

The continuing demographic shift in our population requires an urgent examination of current housing design and construction standards. Many of the participants at the CRG's expressed the importance of ageing in place and the lack of housing choices in their communities. There was interest in innovative housing design and tenure such as co-housing, co-operatives or mixed equity models. The incorporation of universal design principles within housing developments was seen as critical to allow people to remain living in their homes as long as possible. This change will require planning and regulatory systems at both state and local government level with greater responsiveness and adaptability.

The desire to 'age in place' is often hindered by the inappropriateness of a person's house as they age, including ongoing maintenance and adaptability of the design. Many factors influence the decision to 'downsize', one of the barriers often cited is the imposition of stamp duty and moving costs. COTA NSW proposes the introduction of a reduction in stamp duty for people aged 70 and over - if they purchase an owner occupier property that has been constructed to Gold Livable Housing standard. This initiative would create a new market of downsizers seeking properties with this certification, thereby increasing demand and incentivising builders to include these standards in new housing designs. These housing standards would extend the time that older people could remain in their homes, whilst increasing the stock of housing that is adaptable to broader community needs.

Older people consistently tell us that a 'one-stop' service that provides tailored and personalised housing advice would enhance their ability to make informed decisions about their housing choices. This service could bring together fragmented resources gathered from government, community, aged care housing and retirement living sectors.

“There is a lack of 2 bedroom and 1-bedroom units at ground level or ramped units other than retirement villages.”

Housing choices

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Provide a range of affordable, appropriate and accessible housing choices for older people in NSW.

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Getting around



The ability of older people to remain engaged and participate in the social and cultural life of the community is greatly enhanced by the availability of good public and community transport. Access to pedestrian infrastructure is also critical, as it is a key enabler for older people to maintain their independence, stay physically active and socially engaged.

The lack of footpaths and/or poor footpath maintenance is consistently articulated as older people's greatest impediment to getting around in their communities. Given the importance of this type of infrastructure, COTA NSW urges the creation of an "Active Transport Infrastructure Commissioner" within NSW Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) who would ensure that infrastructure such as paths and cycleways be elevated to an essential component in all new and existing

residential and commercial developments. This position would work collaboratively with the recently created Open Space and Parklands Commissioner, Local Government, transport and health departments to develop a state-wide network of active transport infrastructure that is based on the World Health Organisations (WHO) Aged Friendly Communities framework. Funding for Local Government to increase the coverage of paths through the existing 'Walking and Cycling Program' and other major road infrastructure projects would be required.

I know I'd go out more if we had better footpaths in our area.

Getting around

The ability to access public transport was widely cited across our CRGs as critical to enable older people to shop, seek medical treatment and participate in their communities. Of concern was the provision of lift access at train stations across the metropolitan and regional network. Access to upgraded train stations with lifts on the same line is not always easy due to connecting bus services or insufficient parking. COTA NSW calls for the acceleration of train station upgrades and a doubling of annual Transport Access Program annual budget.

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Inclusive communities



An inclusive community is one in which all older people have the opportunity to participate socially, economically and culturally in community life. Inclusivity becomes more difficult to achieve when communities and individuals experience social isolation. Disadvantage, geographic isolation, transport barriers, limited access to health and other services and poor community cohesion create the conditions of social isolation. If not addressed, this can contribute to poor physical and mental health outcomes such as cognitive decline or loneliness.

For many older people, the pace of change and the way in which information and services are provided is excluding and stressful. Although, increasing numbers of older Australians are digitally literate, there is still a large group of older people that do not have access to a computer or smartphone. These people

may not feel skilled or comfortable using technology, and many simply prefer to receive information in a more traditional format.

As governments have previously done, providing information in a range of community languages, it is essential that government departments use the principles of inclusivity through a commitment to deliver information and services in a variety of non-digital methods. Communication would be improved with the implementation of practical measures such as the inclusion of direct phone numbers for further assistance when mailing correspondence or providing forms and fact sheets in plain-English formats. Consideration of the method of promotion of government programs and services is also vital, with many older people relying on their local newspaper or library to source information.

Inclusive communities

The use of community development programs and practices to implement community led initiatives to foster inclusiveness and cohesion is an essential component in successfully addressing many of the issues raised in our CRGs. Sector Support and Development Officers (SSDO) often located within Local Government, possess an expert understanding of their communities' strengths and challenges; are best placed to work collaboratively with other local services to develop and implement responsive and adaptive solutions to issues such as loneliness and information exclusion.

These positions were previously funded under the Home and Community Care (HACC) program, and consequently funded by the Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) and Department of Family and Community Services Ageing, Disability and Home Care (ADHC) under the Community Care Support Program (CCSP) and auspiced by non-government community organisations and local government. Whilst the funding from the Commonwealth has been extended to June 2020, NSW State funding arrangements ceased on June 30, 2018.

A lot of older people don't have access to the internet so can't look things up on a computer. Low cost printed information would be useful.

We are being left behind. Everything is moving online.

These roles have an ability to efficiently and effectively link people to existing resources and services. COTA NSW calls for the reinstatement of funding for these positions to support the implementation of the NSW Ageing Strategy through community development initiatives, realisation of local ageing strategies and capacity building of service providers.

The issue of loneliness and its negative impacts on a person's health and wellbeing continues to be of concern. The subjective nature of loneliness and disparate reasons for its occurrence requires a multifaceted and individualised approach. For many people experiencing loneliness, introduction to a social group or volunteering opportunity is beneficial, for others additional supports are required such as access to psychological or counselling services.

New recurrent funding (3-5 year period) is required to resource a suite of community-based approaches to tackle this emerging health issue. Organisations or community groups would be required to partner with other services or local government, demonstrate that projects or programs are evidence based and conduct thorough evaluation. It is proposed that there would be a biennial grant process and a budget over the forward estimates of \$1.5 million.

Inclusive communities

We recommend:

Implement policies and programs that facilitate an inclusive and connected community.

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- Reinstate funding for Sector Support Officers to support the implementation of the NSW Ageing Strategy through community development initiatives, realisation of local ageing strategies and capacity building of service providers.
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COTA NSW also supports these campaigns

1. CWA NSW & National Rural Health Alliance call for action on Rural & Regional Health Inequality
2. Everybody's Home
3. Make Renting Fair
4. Right To Home
5. Heart Foundation Safe Active Travel to School
6. Dementia Friendly Communities Program