

MEDIA RELEASE

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Wellbeing of older Australians now ranked 17th in the world

Australia is ranked 17th on the Global AgeWatch Index 2015 which ranks 96 countries according to the social and economic wellbeing of older people. Australia is outranked by the Scandinavian countries, most of western Europe, Canada and New Zealand.

COTA Australia CE, Ian Yates, said Australia had slipped down four places from 13th place last year, reflecting a continued lack of priority in addressing the needs and opportunities of our ageing population.

“The release of this index each year provides a great indication of how Australia is faring compared to the rest of the world in our treatment of older people,” Mr Yates said; “regrettably the news is not encouraging”.

The report says there is a concerning 33 percent poverty rate among people aged 60 and over in Australia and points to the need for a coordinated strategy on ageing across all portfolios and jurisdictions.

“Although our ranking of 62nd on income security is not a fair reflection, our low performance in the income security category underlines the need for reform of our retirement income system and the Newstart allowance; and emphasizes the austerity and tight targeting of our pension system.

“The fact that many older Australian’s are stuck for years on the paltry Newstart Allowance before they are eligible for the age pension is also a significant contributor to poverty among older people.

“Too many older Australians spend years on Newstart Allowance, sliding deeper into poverty each year. The rate of the Newstart Allowance is inadequate for anyone to live on and needs to be increased urgently.

“Newstart was designed to be short term to support people while they are seeking work. Unfortunately factors like age discrimination make it a challenge for people over 50 to re-enter the workforce and far too many become long term unemployed and then drop out of job search altogether.

“A prosperous country like ours can do much better in supporting both young and mature age unemployed,” Mr Yates said.

The report also highlights issues related to older women and how poorly they are faring across the world.

“In Australia, older women are becoming homeless in increasing numbers due to low superannuation accumulation and careers which are broken to take on caring roles.

“Another issue raised in the report on which we could do better is age-friendly infrastructure especially public transport. This is a big problem for many older people who have trouble finding accessible or regular transport.”

Mr Yates said Australia’s 17th ranking should be a wakeup call to governments that we urgently need a comprehensive ageing strategy and a coordinated plan for our ageing population across national and state governments.

“We should be seeing older people as a resource, and spending on them as an investment. For example, if you spend right in health promotion and illness prevention, and the pension is sufficient, you actually save money in the long term in acute healthcare and aged care.”

MEDIA NOTE: Full Global AgeWatch Index 2014 report, graphs and exec summary can be found at:
<https://helpage.box.com/s/8az4hq1n1sm8ojanpku37p07mf8rltga>

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COTA Australia is the peak policy development, advocacy and representation organisation for older Australians, representing COTAs in every State and Territory and through them over 500,000 older Australians.