



TIME FOR AN AGE-FRIENDLY QUEENSLAND 2015 STATE ELECTION PRIORITIES



**Prepared by
COTA QUEENSLAND**

January 6, 2015



COTA Queensland

Level 1, 25 Mary Street
(07) 3316 2999
www.cotaqld.org.au

Authorised by:
Mark Tucker-Evans
Chief Executive
mte@cotaqld.org.au
(07) 3316 2999

1. TIME FOR AN AGE-FRIENDLY QUEENSLAND

COTA is a state-based organisation of older Queenslanders and organisations of older Queenslanders working to bring about positive social change. Our mission is to mobilise older people and those who work with them to age well in a fair society. COTA Queensland has been facilitating the participation of older Queenslanders since 1957.

Given the global challenge of ageing, COTA Queensland believes the World Health Organisation's age-friendly cities and communities framework is a valuable guide for Queensland's political leaders, policy makers, and planners. Age-friendly communities grew out of the United Nations' Year of the Older Person in 1999. The UN adopted a proactive role in influencing ageing-related policies at the international level and in 2002 governments adopted the *Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing* at the Second United Nations World Assembly.

Following this, the World Health Organisation (WHO) launched the *Active Ageing* policy framework to focus attention on active and healthy ageing. The four pillars of the *Active Ageing* framework are health, participation, security and life-long learning. To assist communities in putting the *Active Ageing* framework into practice, the WHO created the Age-friendly Cities Project, designed to serve as a starting point for age-friendly community development initiatives across the globe.

Through the community-based research of the Age-friendly Cities Project, eight key indicators of an age-friendly city were identified:

- Community support and health services
- Outdoor spaces and buildings
- Transportation
- Housing
- Social participation
- Respect and social inclusion
- Civic participation and employment, and
- Communication and information.

With the culmination of the project in 2007, the WHO launched the *Global Age-Friendly Cities Guide*, which led to the establishment of the WHO Global Network of Age-friendly Cities. Since 2010 there has been a growing network of communities worldwide participating in the program. Communities that sign up to the network signal their commitment to creating an inclusive and accessible environment that benefits an ageing population.

Early adopters of the age-friendly movement internationally were Portland and New York in the United States, Manchester in England, and County Louth in Ireland. Canada is the country with the most extensive uptake of the age-friendly approach. Between 2007 and 2011, more than 560 communities in eight Canadian provinces identified as being age-friendly.

COTA Queensland recommends:

- **The Queensland Parliament Health and Community Services Committee conduct an Inquiry into the Policy Implications of an Ageing Community with a view to the Queensland Government, as well as Regional Councils, joining the *WHO Global Age Friendly Cities and Communities Network*.**

2. HOW THE QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT CAN SUPPORT OLDER PEOPLE

2.1 Concessions

COTA Queensland is concerned about the future of state government concessions to pensioners, seniors and veterans. Older Queenslanders on fixed low incomes rely on assistance from the Queensland Government to meet the rising costs of energy, rates, water, and transport.

In July 2014 the Queensland Government agreed, after lobbying by COTA Queensland and other seniors organisations, to maintain the funding of pensioner and senior concessions after initially indicating it could not meet the funding shortfall caused by the Federal Government's cancellation of the National Partnership Agreement on concessions.

COTA Queensland remains concerned that the financial pressure facing the Queensland Government could see pensioner concessions fall in value and potentially disappear.

It should be noted that residents who hold a Commonwealth Health Care Card cannot access pensioner concessions on energy and transport (unlike in most other states). This includes Queenslanders in the 50-59 age bracket who are unable to find sufficient employment due to age discrimination or social isolation. At the 2012 State Election, COTA Queensland supported an extension of energy and transport concessions to resident Commonwealth Health Care Card holders. This remains our position.

In our 2013-14 Budget Submission, COTA Queensland requested the Queensland Government to introduce a means-test to determine eligibility for the Electricity Rebate Scheme, provided that the process was straightforward, non-intrusive, and based on information already available (for example, eligibility could be based on having both a Queensland Government Seniors Card and a Commonwealth concession card). We continue to hold this position.

COTA Queensland recommends the Queensland Government:

- **revises the Electricity Rebate and Reticulated Natural Gas Rebate eligibility criteria to include resident Commonwealth Health Care Card holders**
- **revises the Electricity Rebate and Reticulated Natural Gas Rebate eligibility criteria to require Queensland Seniors Card holders to also hold a Commonwealth concession card (such as a Commonwealth Seniors Health Card, DVA Gold Card, DVA White Card, or Commonwealth Health Care Card)**
- **provides a rebate to resident pensioners, seniors and veterans who use LPG bottled gas**
- **recognises the Commonwealth Health Care Card for public transport concessions throughout Queensland.**

2.2 Energy

In COTA Queensland's submission to the Queensland Government report *PowerQ: 30-year strategy for Queensland's electricity sector*, we reiterated our concern about improving the levels of consumer protection and access to information about hardship programs, rebates, and complaints processes. Vulnerable consumers include those who experience social or cultural isolation, lack access to computers or other social support, fall outside the scope of the Energy and Water Ombudsman of Queensland (EWOQ), or who live in housing settings (such as caravan parks, residential parks) where electricity bill disputes and rebates are not easily resolved or understood.

COTA Queensland is concerned that vulnerable seniors will continue to experience 'fuel poverty' as energy prices rise faster than the rate of inflation. The move to price monitoring from 1 July 2015 could also place seniors at risk, particularly as many already find their energy bills complex and confusing. Many older Queenslanders do not understand the energy marketplace. They have concerns that switching retailers will leave them in a worse position. Much of the information promoting retail choice is internet based and therefore not visible to a large cohort of older consumers.

COTA Queensland recommends the Queensland Government:

- **funds an education and awareness campaign targeted at seniors to support the introduction of price monitoring and the National Energy Customer Framework in Queensland**
- **ensures that any independent consumer advocacy capability is strengthened and suitably resourced prior to 1 July 2015**
- **increases the resources of the Energy and Water Ombudsman of Queensland prior to price monitoring taking effect from 1 July 2015**
- **resources financial counselling services to assist consumers facing financial hardship**
- **develops an investment program to improve energy efficiency in public housing as well as incentives for private landlords to improve energy efficiency in rental premises**
- **funds the acquisition and installation of advanced meters for recipients of the Queensland Government Electricity Rebate and government-owned public housing.**

2.3 Housing

COTA Queensland has prepared a discussion paper entitled *Achieving Sustainable Seniors' Housing* which explored a range of housing issues that adversely impact upon seniors' ability to achieve and maintain affordable housing throughout retirement. In particular the paper stressed the fact that seniors have limited access to independent sources of retirement living advice. This includes investment advice and advice on housing options available to best support housing sustainability in retirement. For example: What is the best way to downsize? Do we sell up and rent and invest our sale proceeds? Is it best to sell and buy something smaller such as a manufactured home? A major concern of seniors is how to obtain advice that is balanced, informed and relevant to their circumstances. Seniors are a disparate group with different interests, family arrangements, housing requirements, financial circumstances and states of health. To address these issues the discussion paper advocated for the establishment of an advisory service where seniors could obtain impartial advice on the future housing options available to them.

COTA Queensland recommends the Queensland Government:

- **establishes a Seniors' Housing Centre to provide free and independent advice to Queenslanders looking to change their living arrangements as they move towards retirement and beyond.**

2.4 Transport

Transport is essential for accessing health, community, workplace, education and training appointments and opportunities. Public transport and taxis continue to be difficult for some older people to use - for example, because of difficulties in using ticketing or card technologies, inaccessible vehicles and infrastructure, the cost of fares, or the speed and volume of pedestrian traffic at busy railway and busway stations.

COTA Queensland is a member of the state government's Public Transport Advisory Group as well as the Queensland Rail Accessibility Reference Group. We have also provided feedback to TransLink about accessibility initiatives arising from the Department of Transport and Main Roads' Disability Action Plan. For example, we have supported moves to add go-card functionality to the Vision Impairment Travel Pass, which would give greater choice and empowerment for vision impaired passengers at gated CBD railway stations in Brisbane. We welcome the Queensland Government's trial of a new product to assist vision impaired passengers in this way.

In our 2013-14 Budget Submission, COTA Queensland supported an annual payment option for pensioners renewing their driver licence at aged 75 years. We also proposed an annual TransLink travel pass option to enable seniors aged 75 years and older to access public transport services on the same basis as the TransLink Access Pass. These proposals have not been adopted so far by the Queensland Government.

Transport is a significant barrier affecting older people's access to health services particularly after hours when public transport reduces significantly and safety concerns increase—both on public transport and getting to transport hubs. Taxis and private transport have cost implications that older people on fixed and low incomes may not be able to meet and these costs are significantly higher for people in rural and regional areas.

COTA Queensland recommends the Queensland Government:

- **introduces an affordable annual pass for resident pensioners, seniors and veterans aged 75 years and older for use on public transport in Queensland**
- **introduces an annual payment option for resident pensioners, seniors and veterans renewing their Queensland driver licence at aged 75 years.**
- **convenes a community and patient travel summit to address gaps and strategies for improved coordination.**

2.5 Health

Access to affordable and quality health care is consistently identified as a priority issue for older Queenslanders. This includes access to primary health care, hospital based services, medications and information and activities that help people age well.

COTA Queensland's vision is for a statewide healthcare system which is linked up, responsive, safe, efficient, innovative and most importantly has the needs of patients at the centre – receiving the right care, at the right time and in the right place. In order for this to happen, consumers must be engaged at a local and systems level to co-design the healthcare system.

Through our members and through COTA Queensland's links to the Queensland Clinical Senate, we are aware of the high priority for community access to information and support around advanced care planning and advanced care directives. COTA Queensland supports the increased, coordinated use of telehealth and hospital in the home services to provide services to people where they were previously unavailable.

Many older people are concerned about the care they will receive at the end of their life and if they will be treated with dignity and have their wishes respected. Improving palliative care and making it available where and when it is needed is critical if people are to have a better death. Queenslanders should be able to choose where to die, be that home, hospice, residential aged care or hospital.

People want to make decisions about the type of care they receive at the end of their lives. Currently there are a wide range of statutory provisions, different across each state and territory, to help people put in place end of life care plans. People want to be sure that their plans are respected regardless of whether they've moved from one jurisdiction to another and in which setting they die.

Health promotion activities and prevention strategies can help people make better lifestyle choices and so reduce their risk factors for many non-infectious diseases. There is also a growing body of evidence that lifestyle changes can also help reduce the risk of dementia. Recent activities in health promotion and preventative measures have tended to ignore older people's specific needs. This is despite there being quite strong evidence on the health benefits for individuals of all ages in making better choices and long term savings to the health system in this area.

COTA Queensland recommends the Queensland Government:

- **funds Health Consumers Queensland to work with consumers, carers and the community to co-design a health system that meets the needs of service users and families**
- **funds a public education campaign for consumers and the community around care at the end of life**
- **works with the Australian Government to increase palliative care funding to ensure all Queenslanders receive good palliative care when, where and for as long as they need it**
- **works with other states and territories to harmonise laws around advance care planning and end of life decisions to ensure people's choices are respected**
- **funds a health literacy campaign that encourages older people to change their lifestyle and address risk factors around alcohol, nutrition, tobacco and exercise**
- **funds the expansion of telehealth, reducing the requirement for older Queenslanders to travel in order to receive specialist care.**

2.6 Employment

Workplace age discrimination is common in Australia, with people over 55 likely to be unemployed more than twice as long as people aged 25-34. Many capable older Queenslanders are forced into retirement before they wish and before they're financially prepared. We need to ensure people work as long as they need and want to. Queensland needs political and business champions to understand this and to model best practice. COTA Queensland agrees with the Financial Services Council that there is 'a role for Government in showcasing best-practice outcomes in employing, retaining and retraining older workers'. The Queensland Plan recognises this in encouraging businesses to employ mature age workers for the skills, experience and mentoring they offer.

COTA Queensland recommends the Queensland Government:

- **convenes an employment summit advocating for an older workforce, including proactive measures to increase public sector employment of workers over 50 years of age.**

2.7 Natural Disasters

During Seniors Week 2014 COTA Queensland held a *Safeguarding Vulnerable Seniors from Natural Disasters* Forum in response to a concern that had been expressed by seniors, service providers, local governments and emergency response organisations that there are no clear statewide strategies in place that provide vulnerable seniors with the necessary support required to prepare for a disaster, survive the event, and then restore life to some level of normality afterwards.

The concerns expressed prior to the forum were strongly supported by forum delegates and in response, a range of measures was proposed by forum attendees to improve upon the current arrangements in place to safeguard seniors. In expressing these concerns, however, delegates recognised that overall at the state and regional levels the responsible government agencies and community service organisations undertake good work in respect to disaster preparedness and response. Equally the Local Disaster Management Groups (LDMGs) play an effective role in coordinating local preparation and response activities.

However, all relevant agencies were urged by forum participants to consider how the measures suggested at the forum, in respect to not only vulnerable seniors but all vulnerable groups, could be adopted and implemented. The adoption of many of the ideas expressed at the forum would contribute to the development of an even more resilient and responsive disaster management system in Queensland. Queenslanders will be better equipped to manage their own safety if they are able; and more effective and coordinated assistance will be available to those in a vulnerable situation.

COTA Queensland recommends the Queensland Government:

- **investigates the use of personal locator beacons for vulnerable seniors in isolated communities**
- **develops a register of vulnerable seniors to provide assistance before, during, and after natural disasters.**

3. CONCLUSION

We acknowledge the Queensland Plan identifies a number of activities which support seniors. For example, Queenslanders are encouraged to:

- Assist elderly members of the community—give them a lift to an appointment, offer to do their grocery shopping, or share a meal with them.
- Listen to the stories and learn from the wisdom of our elders.
- Interview long-time residents to record the community’s history and share this with your local council.
- Involve seniors and the least advantaged in community activities and celebrations.
- Employ mature age workers for the skills, experience and mentoring they offer to businesses.
- Take advantage of government incentives to upskill and employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and seniors.
- Ensure facilities and services can be accessed by everyone including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, seniors, migrants and people with disabilities.
- Provide a range of initiatives to promote wellbeing, participation and safety of older Queenslanders.
- Work with local communities to offer free or low cost activities for seniors so they can remain active.

As part of this vision for the next 30 years, COTA Queensland calls on all political parties and candidates to:

- make ageing a policy priority and
- commit to action on key issues impacting on older Queenslanders now and into the future.

This requires leadership and planning, based on a vision of belonging and values of fairness.

We believe that any newly elected Queensland Government should set targets and objectives as part of a Seniors Strategy to address chronic disadvantage and isolation experienced by seniors - and to work towards making Queensland an Age-friendly State.