



**AN AGE-FRIENDLY STATE?**

**SUPPORTING DISADVANTAGED QUEENSLANDERS AS THEY AGE -  
ELECTION 2012 PRIORITIES**

**COTA Queensland**

**March 2012**



## COTA Queensland

---

GPO Box 21, Brisbane, Queensland 4001  
policy@cotaqld.org.au  
(07) 3316 2999 or 1300 738 348  
www.cotaqld.org.au

Authorised by:  
Mark Tucker-Evans  
Chief Executive

Prepared by:  
Mark Tucker-Evans  
Chief Executive

Anna McCormack  
Policy Officer

Mark Young  
Policy Officer

## SUMMARY

---

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.

We believe that governments should deliver responsive and accountable services that assist communities to build inclusive and accessible environments for all ages.

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

Principles of an age-friendly society include:

- ensuring that older people have a basic level of financial security
- developing age-friendly environments
- availability and accessibility of effective health care.

An age friendly society will bring benefits not just to older Queenslanders, but to all members of the community, through better design and planning in homes, the environment, work, training and education, and health systems.

We believe that the newly elected Queensland Government should set targets and objectives as part of a Seniors Strategy to address chronic disadvantage and isolation experienced by seniors, particularly those living in regional and remote communities of Queensland.

## COTA QUEENSLAND – COUNCIL ON THE AGEING

COTA Queensland is a state based organisation committed to advancing the rights, needs and interests of people as they age in Queensland. We aim to help create a more just, equitable and caring community in which older people are actively involved and empowered and have access to appropriate support, services and care.

COTA Queensland bases our policy principles on the World Health Organisation (WHO) active ageing policy pillars of Health, Security and Participation.

As one of the eight State and Territory COTAs that make up COTA Australia, our work is also guided by five principles:

- Maximising the social, economic and political participation of older Australians;
- Promoting positive views of ageing, rejecting ageism and challenging negative stereotypes;
- Promoting sustainable, fair and responsible policies;
- Protecting against and redressing disadvantage;
- Protecting and extending services and programs that are used and valued by older Australians.

COTA Queensland collaborates with other organisations addressing issues that impact upon older people. COTA undertakes community development with vulnerable older people, provides community education and awareness on health promotion issues, and provides a statewide information and referral service. It undertakes research, policy development and advocacy on issues impacting on people as they age in Queensland.

COTA Queensland's objectives include:

- Promoting policies, practices and services that advance well-being and justice for older people;
- Promoting the positive contribution of older people to their own well-being;
- Facilitating collaboration within and between older people's organisations, aged service agencies, Government, the private sector and community groups in working towards well being and social justice for older people;
- Promoting and engaging in research of matters concerning older people;
- Advocating on behalf of the needs, rights and interests of older people, giving priority to those suffering injustice, discrimination, disadvantage or disability;
- Contributing to positive community understanding of ageing;
- Participating as an active member of the COTA network throughout Australia.

## 1. QUEENSLAND'S AGEING DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Queensland's demographic profile is ageing with 545,800 people aged 65 years and older (or 12.3% of the population) in 2009, an increase of 81,200 people since 2004. The age distribution is not even across the State, with the Fraser Coast (18.9%), Toowoomba (13.6%) and Moreton regions (14.7%) all with significantly higher proportions of older people. Other features include:

- The most rapidly growing group of older people are those aged over 85 years, with women outnumbering men by 2 to 1.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged over 55 years are expected to double over the next decade although their life expectancy is still significantly shorter than non-Indigenous Australians.
- The older migrant population is ageing more rapidly than the Australian born population, with the cultural and linguistic backgrounds and their pre-and post migrations experiences varying enormously; within this demographic, people from a refugee background, in particular, may have specific ageing experiences.
- People with an intellectual disability are living into their 60s and 70s, but with early onset age-related conditions such as dementia evident in their 50s.
- The number of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) people aged over 65 years is increasing as are their demands for services to meet their needs and lifestyles.

## 2. COST OF LIVING

More than half a million Queenslanders are aged 65 years and older. Of this group, more than 12% live in the lowest socioeconomic areas (in the 1st Quintile).

Table 1 - Proportion of Older Queenslanders by Quintiles of the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage

Older people	65 and over	%	75 and over	%
Quintile 1	64,129	12.5	27,669	11.9
Quintile 2	126,880	24.8	57,820	24.8
Quintile 3	151,072	29.5	69,309	29.7
Quintile 4	123,883	24.2	57,026	24.4
Quintile 5	45,502	8.9	21,399	9.2
Queensland	511,500	100.0	233,238	100.0

Source: A Scan of Disadvantage in Queensland 2010, UnitingCare Social Justice (p. 124)  
- ABS, 2006c and OESR, 2008A

To support disadvantaged seniors in regional and rural communities facing increased cost of living pressures due to, for example, the growth in mining, COTA Queensland recommends:

- the introduction of a Queensland Government Low Income Concession Card to extend pensioner concessions (rates, water, electricity, gas, motor vehicle registration, public transport) to resident Health Care Card holders between 45 and the age pension age;
- removal of the annual cap for the Pensioner Rate Subsidy Scheme so that pensioners and eligible veterans receive a subsidy of 20 per cent of the gross rates and charges levied by a local council;
- the extension of the Pensioner Water Subsidy Scheme beyond South East Queensland to pensioners and eligible veterans throughout the state;
- annual increases to the Electricity Rebate Scheme above any approved electricity price rises.

### 3. HEALTH

The health reforms initiated by the Australian Government which will provide a greater say by consumers and local communities in the planning, design, delivery and evaluation of health services, should be supported by the incoming Queensland Government.

Queensland Health's Patient Travel Subsidy provides assistance to patients, and in some cases to their carers, to enable them to access specialist medical services not available locally. The subsidy is provided to approved patients and carers to assist in the cost of travel and accommodation to the nearest specialist service that is more than 50kms from the patient's nearest hospital. The last adjustment to the travel component in 2007-2008 was an increase in the subsidy from 10 to 15 cents per kilometre. Accommodation assistance remains at \$30 per night.

COTA recommends an immediate increase in the Patient Travel Subsidy to 65 cents per kilometre and \$85 per night for accommodation in line with the Australian Taxation Office benchmark, followed by annual increases to keep pace with the Consumer Price Index.

COTA Queensland advocates for funding of an independent health consumers organisation in Queensland to build on the work of Health Consumers Queensland

#### 4. HOUSING

COTA believes housing is one of the essential keys to good ageing policy. The health impact of good housing offers a developing area of research and existing literature identifies the physical qualities of dwellings that are detrimental to health. Similarly, loneliness has been identified as a serious health issue related to housing tenure. The challenge of building age-friendly housing and neighbourhoods crosses all levels of government and provides opportunities for cooperation and collaboration.

Older people who do not own their own homes are particularly vulnerable in the search to locate and keep affordable, safe, secure and appropriate housing. About 82 percent of Australians aged 65 and older live in home ownership, and most of these dwellings are fully owned, however 14.5 percent of older people are renters. This figure, from the 2006 Census, is an increase on 2001 when 12.1 percent of older people were renters. Generally speaking, Queensland has a higher proportion of private renters and a lower proportion of public housing tenants across the different age groups than other States.

Additionally, significant numbers of older people are dropping out of home ownership - and home ownership for low income earners in the 45 to 60 age group is also declining. Older single women are particularly vulnerable. The difference between living in one's own home and living in rental housing is often the difference between living with a reasonable standard of living and living in poverty. This is particularly evident in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

In the context of contracting investment in public housing, plus the absence of priority housing allocation for older people, more people are being forced into the private rental market as they age. Estimates indicate the number of people aged 65 and older living in low-income rental households will increase from 195,000 in 2001 to 419,000 in 2026 (Andrew Jones et al, May 2007) with the largest proportional increase in the numbers of people aged 85 and over. The lack of appropriate housing in the private rental sector, combined with the barriers involved in adapting existing housing, means that older people in this housing sector are more likely than others to have to rely on aged care services including residential services. The subsequent loss of independence is the diametric opposite of the objectives and outcomes the Productivity Commission is recommending across Australia in its Aged Care Report (Productivity Commission, 2011).

A far-sighted State Government of leadership will ensure that housing, whether it be privately rented, State government rented or occupier owned, is designed appropriately to facilitate ageing in place.

COTA calls on the Queensland Government to:

- develop and implement an integrated strategic policy framework for older people's housing, in consultation with the community sector, with a focus on low-income tenants and, in particular, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;

- establish an Older Person’s Housing Unit in the Housing and Homelessness Services area of the Department of Communities;
- introduce Universal Housing Design Regulations, in consultation with the building industry and community sector, to cover all forms of new housing in the State; and
- to facilitate trend analysis and develop practical solutions, ensure the Department of Communities collects and analyses data on all forms of older people’s housing outputs and outcomes, and makes the data and analysis available to interested community sector organisations.

## 5. TRANSPORT

Successive State Governments have undervalued (and underfunded) public transport services, infrastructure and planning throughout Queensland. The TransLink Transit Authority is struggling to keep up with the transport needs of the growing population of South East Queensland. TransLink’s emphasis on ‘mass transit’ means that older people and younger people with mobility problems are at times overlooked in the planning and delivery of services.

For example, residents whose home does not meet the distance/population formula of the TransLink Network Plan have few transport options if they cannot easily walk or use mobility devices outside their home. This problem is compounded by the lack of indexation to the maximum subsidy of the Taxi Subsidy Scheme.

To improve the accessibility of public transport, COTA Queensland recommends:

- TransLink publish a disability action plan each year identifying accessibility targets and compliance (as per the Queensland Rail accessibility plan);
- TransLink actively promote the TransLink Access Pass and remove the annual \$60 fee (as per Metlink in Melbourne);
- an immediate increase in the maximum subsidy of the Taxi Subsidy Scheme from \$25 per trip to \$50 per trip, followed by increases aligned with taxi fare changes;
- the Department of Transport and Main Roads introduce a Scooter and Wheelchair Travel Pass (as per Metlink in Melbourne).

To improve the affordability of public transport, COTA Queensland recommends:

- free weekend travel for all state and territory Seniors Card holders on TransLink bus, rail ferry network; qconnect bus network (as per Metlink in Melbourne);

- free off-peak travel for Queensland Government Seniors + go card holders (as per the Seniors SmartRider Card in Perth);
- cheaper all-day travel options (as per the Excursion Fares in NSW);
- extension of the Queensland Government TPI Veteran Travel Pass to include all Australian war veterans with a Commonwealth DVA Gold Card (as per NSW and WA).

To improve transport options in rural and regional communities, COTA recommends the formation of a Community Transport Office within the Department of Local Government and Planning to fund local government to provide additional community transport options.

COTA Queensland is aware the loss of a driver licence can mean the loss of livelihood and community connections for seniors with few or no other transport options. To support older drivers and riders, COTA Queensland recommends:

- introduction of a 50% concession on the cost of renewing a driver licence for holders of a Pensioner Concession Card, Seniors Card or Veterans' Affairs Gold Card;
- funding of a consumer awareness program to encourage safe use of mobility scooters on roads, footpaths and public transport, as well as assistance for seniors who may be considering the purchase of a mobility scooter.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The 2012 Queensland Election provides a unique moment:

- to embrace our ageing population as an opportunity, and
- to meet the challenges with a positive approach.

We hope that any new government will make an Age Friendly Queensland a reality by:

- ensuring equity and social inclusiveness
- delivering sustainable planning and community development in a whole of government strategic approach
- improving the health and well being of older Queenslanders.

We encourage the Queensland Government to draw upon the expertise of COTA Queensland in developing plans and policies for the coming decade.