

MEDIA RELEASE

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Budget 2017: government delivers some good news for older Australians but misses some key challenges of an ageing Australia

The 2017 Federal Budget has some good measures for older Australians in the areas of health, housing and mature age employment but missed the opportunity to provide better support for older people with poor oral or dental health.

Leading seniors advocate, COTA Australia's CE Ian Yates said older Australians battling to make ends meet would welcome measures that will take some pressure off the weekly budget.

"The government has again missed the opportunity to really focus in on the challenge and opportunities of an ageing population, but there are measures that will alleviate some of the pressures on older Australians," Mr Yates said.

Replacement of pension concession card

"Changes to the pension assets test which came into effect this year meant over 90,000 pensioners lost their pensioner concession card. This had significant flow on effect for many (depending where they live) who also lost concessions offered by state and territory governments," Mr Yates said.

"This has been a key issue people have raised with us over the last few months and we welcome the government taking steps to return those concessions to those who were impacted.

Housing measures

"Affordable housing is not just an issue for young first home buyers but a huge issue for older people and it is pleasing the government has turned focus on it.

"We welcome measures to increase housing supply, invest in community housing, provide certainty for funding for homelessness services and establishing a body to support low cost finance for affordable housing.

"The measure allowing older Australians to contribute some proceeds from downsizing their home to superannuation to get the tax benefit may be positive.

"However this is likely only to have an impact over the longer term as other drivers come into play for older people considering leaving the family home, and it will have to be monitored for unintended consequences."

Health

"Older people consistently tell us that out of pocket expenses in health is their number one concern.

"Strengthening Medicare through lifting the rebate freeze and guaranteeing Medicare's sustainability in the long term through the Medicare Guarantee Fund will be good news to older people.

"Retaining bulk billing incentives for diagnostics and pathology will also assist with taking some pressure off those out of pocket expenses.

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.

“We welcome additional funding for breast screening for older women and the additional measures to support the choice for the provision of palliative care so older people can die at home, which is their preference.

“We are also pleased to see confirmation that Australian Hearing Services will be retained by the government.

Aged Care

“The Budget contains some modest but welcome financial commitments to the ongoing aged care reform process, which COTA welcomes.

“However we are concerned at a delay in developing an integrated aged care assessment service, and the lack of a definitive commitment to implement the Aged Care Reform Roadmap on a firm and prompt timetable.

(COTA has issued a separate detailed media release on the aged care measures).

Employment

“The modest investment in retraining and reskilling older people acknowledges the massive challenge in overcoming age discrimination and other barriers to mature age employment but doesn't go far enough to meet this growing challenge. Government should be prepared to invest more if this initiative works.

Consumer protections

“Too many older Australians are cheated by dodgy and unscrupulous commercial operators and it is pleasing to see the government commit to increasing financial penalties for those businesses who do the wrong thing.

What's missing

“We are disappointed that there is nothing in this Budget to address the huge issues still facing older people in the areas of oral health, mental health and elder abuse.

“And while the government has announced it will be combining many working age welfare payments, they remain at an unacceptably low level,” Mr Yates said.

Media contact: Ian Yates 0418 835 439, Olivia Greentree 0439 411 774.