



National Seniors
Association

2008-2009

**Budget Submission to the
Australian Capital Territory
Government**

September 2007

Prepared by:

**ACT Policy Group &
National Policy Office
National Seniors Association
T: (02) 6291 8527
Unit 6, 18 Napier Close
Deakin ACT 2600
T: (02) 6282 7677 F: (02) 6282 7655**

Contacts:

**Mr Peter Brady
National Policy Manager
National Policy Office
T: (02) 6282 7677**

Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 1. Executive Summary | 4 |
| 2. About Us..... | 6 |
| 3. National Seniors Submission..... | 7 |
| 3.1 Access to Oral Health Services | 7 |
| 3.2 Ageing At Home | 8 |
| 3.3 Mature Age Employment | 9 |
| 3.4 Residential Aged Care | 10 |
| 3.4.1 Staffing..... | 10 |
| 3.4.2 ACAT | 11 |
| 3.4.3 Planning..... | 11 |
| 3.5 Transport..... | 11 |
| 3.5.1 Community Transport | 11 |
| 3.5.2 Reciprocity..... | 12 |
| 4. References | 13 |

1. Executive Summary

National Seniors welcomes this opportunity to highlight some of the pertinent issues identified by the Australian Capital Territory State Policy Group (ACT SPG) and the broader Australian Capital Territory membership and we look forward to a favourable outcome for our members in the 2008/09 Territory Budget.

National Seniors policies and policy agenda are developed through a comprehensive grassroots process that enables members to contribute through local Branches, regional Zone Committees, State and Territory Policy Groups (SPGs), and a National Policy Group (NPG). The outcomes from this policy formulation process are incorporated into our National Policy Document.

National Seniors ACT SPG was established in 2006 and plays a key role in facilitating the development and implementation of policies contained in National Seniors national and state/territory policy documents. The ACT SPG also acts as a conduit between – National Seniors members in the ACT; relevant community organisations; and the NPG on policy issues of relevance to seniors.

This submission focuses on five (5) policy priority areas, namely:

Summary of Recommendations

Access to Oral Health Services

- *Work collaboratively with the Federal Government to implement all the recommendations contained in the National Oral Health Plan (2004-2013).*
- *Increase funding for the ACT Community Health's dental health services program to ensure that adequate resources are provided for preventative and restorative dental work for older people.*
- *Develop simple and practical oral health care planning principles as part of the overall nutritional care plan for every older person (in the community or care).*

Ageing at Home

- *Fund collaborative research projects that examine the economic and social impacts of social isolation.*
- *Undertake a review of the effectiveness of its Home and Community and Care services (HACC) to ensure that they meet the diverse needs of Canberra's ageing population.*
- *Simplify and standardise access to aged care services and support systems for clients and their families by way of an expanded Aged Care Assessment Program (ACAP).*
- *Significantly increase concessions and discounts to pensioners and low-income self-funded retirees through the ACT Concessions and Seniors Card programs to ensure adequate financial safety nets are provided to our older citizens.*

Mature Age Employment

- *In collaboration with community representatives and business provide funding for the development of additional programs that provide information and assistance to mature age job seekers in the ACT, and that raise awareness of the necessities and benefits of including mature-age workers for employers.*
- *Fund additional training opportunities for mature age job seekers to develop new skills and strengthen existing skills, to assist their return to the workforce.*
- *Work with the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments to improve and standardise Workers Compensation legislation to ensure that employers and mature-aged workers are not disadvantaged by explicit and implicit age-based restrictions (i.e. cessation of entitlements upon reaching 65 years of age or pensionable age).*

Transport

- *Expand community transport services to better meet the needs of the frail aged.*
- *Proactively engage with the Commonwealth, State and Northern Territory Governments to implement a single interstate scheme for Seniors Card holders across Australia.*

Residential Aged Care

- *Undertake a review of the operation of the ACAT program in order to improve efficiency and reduce assessment waiting times for out of hospital consumers.*
- *Provide additional funding for the training of nurses and aged care workers at the TAFE level.*
- *Provide funding for comprehensive research into the appropriate siting of aged care facilities in the ACT.*

We believe if these recommendations are adopted by Government it will go a long way to meeting the current and future needs of older Canberrans.

2. About Us

National Seniors is the largest senior's organisation in Australia with over 285,000 individual members in 170 branches across the country. We are a not-for-profit community organisation with the following objectives:

- to provide economic and social benefits for people 50 years and over;
- to represent our members' views to Government at all levels; and
- to make donations and provide service and advice to charitable institutions assisting people 50 years and over.

National Seniors offers members a vast range of services and benefits and is an influential vehicle for contributing to policy debates affecting older Australians.

The **National Policy Office (NPO)**, based in Canberra, facilitates the implementation of National Seniors' national policy agenda, and advocates on behalf of older Australians to government at all levels, and to business and the broader community. The NPO works closely with our National, State and Territory Policy Groups and our extensive network of State offices, branches and zone committees in determining issues of relevance to older Australians and identifying trends in ageing.

The work of the NPO is assisted by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, through the Community Sector Support Scheme (CSSS). The funding received under this scheme better positions National Seniors to:

- grow the operational capacity of the NPO;
- expand communications with the seniors' community;
- increase engagement opportunities for disadvantaged seniors; and
- act as a conduit for information flow between government and the community in order to draw together seniors' views on issues of relevance and provide a consultative mechanism for the government.

The NPO also plays a key role in informing the development of the research program for the National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre, which in turn, provides research input to the NPO.

The **National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre (NSPAC)**, established in 2002, is co-funded by National Seniors in collaboration with the Department of Health and Ageing. NSPAC's role is to research issues that impact on the ability of seniors to contribute productively to the economy and society. The centre is consumer focused in both the development of its research agenda and conduct of research activities.

National Seniors' policies and policy agenda are developed through a comprehensive grassroots process that enables members to contribute through local branches, regional zone committees, State and Territory Policy Groups (SPGs), and a National Policy Group (NPG). The outcomes from this policy formulation process are incorporated into our *National Policy Document*¹.

¹ National Seniors. 2006. *National Policy Document*. Available at: www.nationalseniors.com.au/Policies.

3. National Seniors Submission

3.1 Access to Oral Health Services

Evidence shows that Australia's adult oral health is the second worst of all OECD countries – it is estimated that more than 650,000 people are on public waiting lists.² Health authorities across the nation have identified the link between poor oral and dental disease and other chronic diseases.

Given the increase in the ageing population; the move of many older dentists to part-time work; and the lack of university training places for new dentists, it is estimated that by 2010 there will be a shortage of more than 1500 dentists across Australia – or 3.8 million dental visits.³

Older people living in residential aged care facilities also face difficulties in accessing oral health care services.

This situation is further compounded by the constant 'buck-passing' between the Commonwealth Government and the states and territories over the responsibility for this crisis.

Whilst it is acknowledged that the ACT Government provided additional funding in the 2007 Budget to enable more than 400 Canberrans to have restorative dental health care, this increase is likely to have only a limited impact on alleviating the long waiting lists for dental care.

It is also acknowledged that the Commonwealth, state and territory governments have prepared a *National Oral Health Plan (2004-2013)*, which contains a broad range of recommendations aimed at ameliorating the current crisis. However, little has been done to implement the *Plan*.

It is recommended that the ACT Government:

- ***Work collaboratively with the Federal Government to implement all the recommendations contained in the National Oral Health Plan (2004-2013).***
- ***Increase funding for the ACT Community Health's dental health services program to ensure that adequate resources are provided for preventative and restorative dental work for older people.***
- ***Develop simple and practical oral health care planning principles as part of the overall nutritional care plan for every older person (in the community or care).***

² National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA) 2005. *Public Dental Services in Australia: Whose Responsibility?* Available

at: <http://nrha.ruralhealth.org.au/cms/uploads/publications/public%20dental%20services%20in%20australia.pdf>

³ Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS). 2006. *Fair Dental Care for Low Income Earners – National Report on the State of Dental Care*. Available at:

http://www.acoss.org.au/upload/publications/papers/1562_Fair%20dental%20care_%20final.pdf.

3.2 Ageing At Home

Over 90% of Australians currently age in their own home. Research shows that by 2010, a high proportion of older Australians will be living alone – we must therefore ensure that they do not become socially isolated from the broader community.

By supporting older Australians who elect to age at home, positive outcomes are provided to both the individual and to government by lessening the demand for residential aged care. The challenge however, is to ensure that this group of seniors receives adequate support and care.

But older people ageing at home face a number of challenges - increasing costs of home maintenance; difficulty undertaking tasks such as gardening and housekeeping; and escalating energy and food costs.

Currently, less than 9% of Canberra's older people are seen by the Aged Care Assessment Team within two days of their first contact.⁴ More alarming though is that when they are assessed, there are limited community services available to support them. *Figure 1* below highlights the inadequate allocation of places for older Canberrans in comparison with other jurisdictions.

Figure 1 - 2007 Aged Care Approvals Round (Place Allocations)

| State/territory | Population (000) | CACPs | EACH | EACH-D | Total places | Total recurrent funds (\$m) | Community Care Grants (\$m) |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|--------------|------------|------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| New South Wales | 6 875.7 | 862 | 332 | 225 | 1,419 | 34.44 | 0.60 |
| Victoria | 5 188.1 | 574 | 223 | 165 | 962 | 23.71 | 0.35 |
| Queensland | 4 162.0 | 449 | 159 | 120 | 728 | 17.49 | 0.58 |
| Western Australia | 2 094.5 | 226 | 96 | 58 | 380 | 9.35 | 0.24 |
| South Australia | 1 581.4 | 172 | 69 | 58 | 299 | 7.58 | 0.08 |
| Tasmania | 492.7 | 51 | 29 | 20 | 100 | 2.73 | - |
| Australian Capital Territory | 338.2 | 25 | 24 | 15 | 64 | 1.97 | - |
| Northern Territory | 213.8 | 18 | 13 | 10 | 41 | 1.20 | - |
| Total | 20 948.9 | 2,377 | 945 | 671 | 3,993 | 98.47 | 1.85 |

(Source: Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing⁵)

⁴ National Data Repository 2006. *Annual Report 2004/05*. Available at: [http://www.healthconnect.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/100A6FB04EFBAF8ECA256F19001012FE/\\$File/acap_nmds_report_0405_part1.pdf](http://www.healthconnect.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/100A6FB04EFBAF8ECA256F19001012FE/$File/acap_nmds_report_0405_part1.pdf)

⁵ Available at: www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/ageing-acar2007-index

It is recommended that the ACT Government:

- ***Fund collaborative research projects that examine the economic and social impacts of social isolation.***
- ***Undertake a review of the effectiveness of its Home and Community and Care services (HACC) to ensure that they meet the diverse needs of Canberra's ageing population.***
- ***Simplify and standardise access to aged care services and support systems for clients and their families by way of an expanded Aged Care Assessment Program (ACAP).***
- ***Significantly increase concessions and discounts to pensioners and low-income self-funded retirees through the ACT Concessions and Seniors Card programs to ensure adequate financial safety nets are provided to our older citizens.***

3.3 Mature Age Employment

The Australian Government's *Second Intergenerational Report* (2007) suggests that a major way of increasing Australia's overall productivity is by lifting workforce participation rates. The retention of mature age workers will also significantly contribute to alleviating the predicted skills shortages in many areas of employment.

While the participation rate of older Australians is now at its highest level on record⁶ there remains an estimated 120,000 mature-aged unemployed job seekers nationwide.⁷ Further, research shows that organisations rarely implement programs specifically aimed at addressing the needs of mature-age workers, such as access to training. Individual concerns such as lack of confidence, familiarity with contemporary technology or practices and so on, also inhibit individuals from actively seeking work for fear of outright rejection.

In the ACT, mature age workers represent an increasing proportion of the workforce. It is estimated that people aged 65 years and over will make up 11.2% of the ACT's population by 2010, and over 16 % by 2020, compared to the 2000 figure of about 8.3%.⁸

Mature age employees have accumulated significant talents, skills and experience. It is important that ACT employers recognise and retain this valuable resource and provide opportunities for mature age workers to continue to work, or to return to work.

⁶ Commonwealth Department of Treasury. *Older men bounce back: the re-emergence of older male workers*. Available at: www.treasury.gov.au/documents/1190/HTML/docshell.asp?URL=04_men.asp

⁷ National Seniors. *Commonwealth Budget Submission 2007-08*. Available at: <http://www.nationalseniors.com.au/>

⁸ ACT Office for Ageing. *The Silver Lining Project – Fact Sheet*. Available at: http://www.ageing.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/56179/Factsheet.pdf

While recognising recent initiatives such as the *Silver Lining Project* the lack of a 'Mature Age Employment Strategy' continues to limit progress in the ACT. In particular, our members have expressed the need for greater assistance and information for mature age job seekers and awareness by prospective employers of the advantages of mature age employees.

It is recommended that the ACT Government:

- ***In collaboration with community representatives and business provide funding for the development of additional programs that provide information and assistance to mature age job seekers in the ACT, and that raise awareness of the necessities and benefits of including mature-age workers for employers.***
- ***Fund additional training opportunities for mature age job seekers to develop new skills and strengthen existing skills, to assist their return to the workforce.***
- ***Work with the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments to improve and standardise Workers Compensation legislation to ensure that employers and mature-aged workers are not disadvantaged by explicit and implicit age-based restrictions (i.e. cessation of entitlements upon reaching 65 years of age or pensionable age).***

3.4 Residential Aged Care

3.4.1 Staffing

The Australian Government has made a significant investment in residential aged care through the *Securing the future of aged care for Australians* package and the additional funding contained in the 2007-08 Commonwealth Budget.

Notwithstanding, the package and additional Budget measures did not directly address the issue of staffing pressures in residential settings.

In particular, the shortage of qualified staff due to low wages, inadequate training provision and stressful working conditions continue to be a concern for providers and consumers. The number of nurses working in aged care has declined by more than 10 per cent since 1996, while at the same time the number of residents in aged-care facilities has increased by around 13 per cent.⁹

Increasing the supply of qualified nursing staff and trained personal care workers must be a priority for all levels of government.

Accordingly, the ACT Government must take action in the tertiary education sector in order to encourage more students to pursue nursing as a career and to undertake either TAFE-level training or nursing training at university level.

⁹ Aged Care Quality Association. 2007. *Aged Care at Crisis Point*. Available at: http://www.acqa.org.au/news/aged_care_at_crisis_point

3.4.2 ACAT

National Seniors believes the operation of the ACAT program could be improved in order to reduce waiting times for assessment to aged care facilities. While the 2007-2008 ACT Budget estimates the average waiting time for an ACAT assessment to be two (2) days¹⁰ our members have expressed concern that the actual waiting time is much longer.

3.4.3 Planning

The present lack of cohesion between the Australian Government (which funds residential aged care facilities) and Territory governments (who facilitate their design and location) often results in poor siting, inappropriate design and operational delays.

Further, the anticipated ageing of the ACT population and the resultant increase in demand for aged care beds will place considerable pressures on the ACT aged care industry. In order to meet these future demands and to ensure that the current siting and design problems are addressed, comprehensive research will need to be undertaken.

It is recommended that the ACT Government:

- ***Undertake a review of the operation of the ACAT program in order to improve efficiency and reduce assessment waiting times for out of hospital consumers.***
- ***Provide additional funding for the training of nurses and aged care workers at the TAFE level.***
- ***Provide funding for comprehensive research into the appropriate siting of aged care facilities in the ACT.***

3.5 Transport

3.5.1 Community Transport

Older Australians ageing at home typically have a much greater reliance on community transport services for both ease and economy of travel within their community. These services, which are mostly funded by HACC (Home and Community Care), offer frail aged with access to suitable, affordable and efficient transport, and provide opportunities for community engagement.

While lone older persons, who are typically less likely to own their own car, are generally more reliant on these services than older couples,¹¹ reliance increases for all older persons as they reach the age where they can no longer drive themselves, or have difficulty accessing normal public transport.

¹⁰ ACT Government. *2007-2008 Budget*. Available at: <http://www.treasury.act.gov.au/budget/index.shtml>

¹¹ Chief Ministers Department. Available at: <http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/demography/profile/html/transport.html>

While acknowledging that HACC funding in the ACT for 2006-07 was \$22.5 million, an increase of almost 8.5 per cent over funding in 2005-06,¹² National Seniors members have expressed their concern that the current provision of community transport services in the ACT is inadequate.

In particular, our members have identified a lack of universal coverage and long waiting times. This transport disadvantage needs to be immediately addressed, particularly in respect to implications for general health and social isolation.

3.5.2 Reciprocity

While noting that previous attempts by the Commonwealth Government to introduce a national reciprocal transport scheme have been unsuccessful, the current period of economic prosperity, growth in interstate travel and increased travel costs for seniors have ensured the issue remains pressing for older Australians.

Currently, the cost to an ACT Seniors Card holder of a return trip from Sydney (central) to visit the Jenolan Caves (Blue Mountains) is \$23.20. This contrasts sharply with the \$2.50 fare for travel companions with a NSW Seniors Card.¹³

Introducing a national transport concession scheme would go a long way to eliminating the anomalies and inequities created by the current situation, and would benefit all 40,000 Seniors Card holders in the ACT.¹⁴ It would also remove a major disincentive for interstate Seniors Card holders to visit Canberra, and would provide a welcome boost to ACT tourism.

It is recommended that the ACT Government:

- ***Expand community transport services to better meet the needs of the frail aged.***
- ***Proactively engage with the Commonwealth, State and Northern Territory Governments to implement a single interstate scheme for Seniors Card holders across Australia.***

¹² Commonwealth Health Department. *Media Release*. Available at: <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/ministers/publishing.nsf/Content/mr-yr07-ss-san014.htm>

¹³ City Rail NSW. Available at: <http://www.cityrail.nsw.gov.au/>

¹⁴ ACT Government. *ACT Seniors Card Directory 2006-2008*. Available at: http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0019/6328/Seniors_Card_Directory.pdf

4. References

Electronic Sources

Commonwealth Department of Treasury. *Older men bounce back: the re-emergence of older male workers*. Available at:

www.treasury.gov.au/documents/1190/HTML/docshell.asp?URL=04_men.asp

ACT Office for Ageing. *The Silver Lining Project – Fact Sheet*. Available at:

http://www.ageing.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/56179/Factsheet.pdf

Aged Care Quality Association. *Aged Care at Crisis Point*. Available at:

http://www.acqa.org.au/news/aged_care_at_crisis_point

ACT Government. *2007-2008 Budget*. Available at:

<http://www.treasury.act.gov.au/budget/index.shtml>

Chief Ministers Department. *Community Transport Fact sheet*. Available at:

<http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/demography/profile/html/transport.html>

Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing. *Media Release*. Available at:

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/ministers/publishing.nsf/Content/mr-yr07-ss-san014.htm>

City Rail NSW. Available at: <http://www.cityrail.nsw.gov.au/>

ACT Government. 2006. *ACT Seniors Card Directory 2006-2008*. Available at:

http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/6328/Seniors_Card_Directory.pdf

National Advisory Committee on Oral Health. 2004. *Health Mouths Healthy Lives - Australia's National Oral Health Plan 2004 – 2013*

National Data Repository 2006. *Annual Report 2004/05*. Available at:

[http://www.healthconnect.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/100A6FB04EFBAF8ECA256F19001012FE/\\$File/acap_nmds_report_0405_part1.pdf](http://www.healthconnect.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/100A6FB04EFBAF8ECA256F19001012FE/$File/acap_nmds_report_0405_part1.pdf)

National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA). 2005. *Public Dental Services in Australia: Whose Responsibility?* Available at:

<http://nrha.ruralhealth.org.au/cms/uploads/publications/public%20dental%20services%20in%20australia.pdf>