



National Seniors

2008-2009

Budget Submission to the

Victorian

Government

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Prepared by:

**The Victorian State Policy Group & the
National Policy Office
National Seniors Australia
Unit 6, 18 Napier Close
Deakin ACT 2600
T: (02) 6282 7677 F: (02) 6282 7655**

Contact:

**National Policy Office
T: (02) 6282 7677**

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1. Executive Summary

National Seniors welcomes this opportunity to highlight some of the pertinent issues identified by the Victorian State Policy Group (SPG) and the broader Victorian membership and we look forward to a favourable outcome for our members in the 2008-09 State 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 Victorian SPG was established in 2006 and plays a key role in facilitating the development and implementation of policies contained in National Seniors National Policy Document. The Victorian SPG also acts as a conduit between – National Seniors members in Victoria; the Victorian Government; relevant community organisations; and the NPG on policy issues of relevance to seniors.

This submission focuses recommendations to the Victorian Government that fit under seven (7) policy priority areas, namely:

- Commonwealth/State Relations
- Mental Health
- Healthy and Active Ageing
- Challenging Perceptions of Seniors
- Chronic Disease Management
- Housing/Accommodation Issues for Seniors
- Environment

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

2. About Us

National Seniors is the largest senior's organisation in Australia with over 255,000 individual members in 165 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.

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.

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.

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

3. National Seniors Submission

3.1 Commonwealth/State Relations

Given that the ageing portfolio straddles Commonwealth, state and local responsibilities, it is crucial that the various levels of government work collaboratively if ageing initiatives are to be planned, developed and implemented in an effective manner. Unfortunately, there is a current lack of cohesion across government, which is resulting in poor strategic direction, gaps in service delivery and poor information dissemination.

A national Ministerial Council that reports directly to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and has specific responsibility for the broad range of issues that affect older Australians (e.g. health and aged care, mature age employment, financial security, housing affordability and positive ageing) is required to overcome the current dysfunctional arrangements.

The complexities and overlaps inherent in aged care provision are one example of an area that would greatly benefit from a dedicated national Ministerial Council.

While some aged care services are funded by the Commonwealth, others are jointly funded by the Commonwealth and the states and territories. There are some (17) seventeen different funding arrangements for community care services including: Home and Community care (HACC); Veterans Home Care; Community Aged Care Packages (CACPs); Carer Respite Services and many more – all with varying eligibility requirements.

The lack of cohesion and direction across government in respect to aged care has no doubt contributed to the current situation: a complex web of services and funding sources, that is increasingly difficult for individuals and their families to navigate.

It is recommended that the Victorian Government:

- ***Urge the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to immediately establish a National Council comprising Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers responsible for Ageing, which would report directly to COAG and be responsible for developing strategic responses to the Intergenerational Report and other national ageing issues.***

3.2 Mental Health

The National Seniors Victorian SPG is committed to a process of genuine and well-resourced reform in the mental health area for older Victorians, and to developing policies to reduce stigma and discrimination for an ageing population with a mental illness.

As stated in the National Mental Health Plan 2003-2008, good mental health is fundamental to the wellbeing of individuals, their families, and the whole population. Conversely, mental health problems and mental illness are among the greatest causes of disability, diminished quality of life, and reduced productivity. People

affected by mental health problems often have high levels of morbidity and mortality, experiencing poorer general health and higher rates of death from a range of causes, including suicide. These conditions are significant in terms of prevalence and disease burden, and have far-reaching impacts for families, carers and others in the community².

Whilst National Seniors recognises the work of organisations such as the Mental Health Foundation of Australia (Victoria) and the Victorian Government's Mental Health Services, older people's mental health needs further attention.

As beyondblue states, depression in older people is common and may occur for different reasons. However, whilst the onset of a physical illness or personal loss and sadness can be common, depression is not a normal part of ageing³ and should therefore be recognised as a crucial issue for older people. Further, around one million Australian adults live with depression each year. Depression rates are higher in aged-care facilities, with as many as 51% of high-care and 30% of low-care residents reported as depressed.

It is recommended that the Victorian Government:

- ***Develop programs which highlight the nature of mental health issues as experienced by older people, such as conducting community workshops to facilitate change in this area and organising a media campaign to draw attention to older people's mental health issues.***
- ***Improve the availability of assistance and support to carers of mental health sufferers throughout Victoria.***
- ***Improve carer support, including respite opportunities, individual carer support programs and universality across rural and regional areas.***
- ***Ensure that mental health programs are designed to take into account cultural, religious, financial and regional diversity.***

3.3 Healthy and Active Ageing

The National Seniors Australia Victorian SPG is committed to ensuring older people continue to be fit, healthy, actively involved in, and well supported by their communities.

Adequate funding from Local, State and Commonwealth governments is essential to enable older people to be independent and productive.

As ageing will be experienced differently by individuals within the population, the World Health Organisation (WHO) represents ageing as a positive result of improved public health standards and defines Active Ageing as:

² Commonwealth of Australia. 2003. *National Mental Health Plan 2003-2008*.

³ Beyondblue. 2007. *Depression in older people*. Available at:

http://www.beyondblue.org.au/index.aspx?link_id=7.246&tmp=FileDownload&fid=774

“... The process of optimising opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age.”⁴

It is recommended that the Victorian Government:

- ***Develop processes which address changing population issues (i.e. ensuring that the design of homes and townships benefit from collaborative partnerships between local government, community groups and business).***
- ***Provide additional funding to enable continuing participation of older people in social, economic, educational, cultural, spiritual and civic activities.***
- ***Address the key issues that affect healthy and active ageing with regard to activities, facilities, and services promoting healthy living and participation, which allow older people to feel independent, safe and secure.***

3.4 Challenging Perceptions of Seniors

Seniors can often be portrayed negatively, when in fact they participate actively and productively within the Victorian community. Portraying seniors in a positive and productive light recognises their contribution to the economic, social and cultural growth of Victoria. Promoting positive images of seniors supports their contribution to the broader community, whether it be through work, learning, volunteering or community activities⁵.

It is also important that seniors receive adequate recognition for their voluntary contributions, which add several billion dollars annually to the economy⁶. It is important that seniors are perceived by the wider community as an underutilised resource rather than a liability and that they in fact provide much of the social capital in society.

National Seniors supports the efforts of the Victorian Government to encourage local government to consider the needs of older Australians when forming policies and establishing new programs.

National Seniors encourages the Victorian Government to work with local government, business and a broad range of community organisations in order to develop innovative community support activities for older people. To ensure variety in these activities partnerships should also be developed with schools, colleges, universities and with local sporting groups and clubs.⁷

⁴ WHO, 2002, *Active Ageing, A Policy Framework*

⁵ National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre. 2006. www.productiveageing.com.au

⁶ Ironmonger, D. S. (2000). Measuring volunteering in economic terms. *Volunteers and volunteering*. J. Warbuton and M. Oppenheimer. Australia, Federation Press: 56-72.

⁷ Ideas based on: Clarence City Council, *Positive Ageing Plan 2007-2011*, Available at: <http://www.ccc.tas.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=601>

It is recommended that the Victorian Government:

- ***Initiate a program that promotes a positive image of seniors and supports their contribution to the broader community.***
- ***Explore ways of providing adequate recognition for seniors' voluntary contributions and implement a program that meets this objective.***
- ***Ensure that contact is made with key media personnel to address the language and stereotypes which they apply to older people.***

3.5 Chronic Disease Management

According to the Australian General Practice Network (AGPN), over three million Australians, or nearly one in seven, suffer from chronic disease and the problem is likely to be one of the great health challenges for Australia and the world in the 21st Century⁸. Further, the AGPN defines chronic diseases and conditions as those which are long term (lasting more than six months), non-communicable, involving some functional impairment or disability and are usually incurable. Examples of chronic disease include diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular disease, asthma and certain mental health conditions.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), in 2002-03 there were 6.7 million hospital admissions in Australia, with 1.1 million (17.1%) of these being for the 12 main chronic diseases⁹. In 2000-01, chronic diseases covered accounted for \$11.0 billion, or 22.4% of the total allocated health expenditure.¹⁰

The Victorian Government established the Hospital Admission Risk program (HARP) in 2001-02 to develop preventive models of care involving hospitals and community agencies which focused on people with chronic and complex conditions and gave priority to high volume and/or frequent users of the acute public hospital system¹¹.

Further, in 2003 the Victorian Government launched a policy aimed at coordinating care and services for older people, including chronic disease management services, entitled *Improving care for older people: a policy for Health Services*. The policy states that older people often require access to specialist assessment and treatment and a variety of support services to be able to maintain their independence in the community, and that there is currently a greater emphasis on the management of chronic conditions as part of joint arrangements with GPs, hospitals and community service providers through various integrated disease management programs¹².

⁸ Australian General Practice Network. 2007. Available at: <http://www.adgp.com.au/site/index.cfm?display=333>

⁹ Coronary heart disease, stroke, lung cancer, colorectal cancer, depression, diabetes, asthma, Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, chronic kidney disease, oral diseases, arthritis, osteoporosis.

¹⁰ AIHW. 2005. *Health system expenditure on chronic disease*. Available at: http://www.aihw.gov.au/cdarf/data_pages/health_care_costs/index.cfm

¹¹ Victorian Government Health Information. 2007. *HARP – Chronic Disease Management*. Available at: <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/harp-cdm/>

¹² Victorian Government Department of Human Services. 2003. *Improving care for older people: a policy for Health Services*. Available at: <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/older/improvingcare.pdf>

It is recommended that the Victorian Government:

- ***Support older people in the community with a chronic illness through the development of new and innovative programs to address the issues associated with management of chronic disease.***
- ***Ensure that carers are given access to information of support services for those people with a chronic disease.***
- ***Conduct an independent review to measure the progress and identify gaps in chronic disease management programs/initiatives.***

3.6 Housing/Accommodation Issues for Seniors

According to the *Housing for the Aged Action Group* (HAGG), in 2003:

Victoria's official public housing waiting list is 37,000 with an estimated 70,000 households eligible to apply. Waiting times for all stock types (excluding bed-sit accommodation) in a majority of areas have blown out to 12-15 years. Waiting times under the early housing system is typically a 2-3 year wait. For people of Age Pension age, indefinite waiting times are untenable. This appalling situation has been caused by an inadequate supply of government funding for public housing. It is estimated that the reduction in funds for public housing construction has reduced by 26% in the last ten years¹³.

In conjunction with the lack of supply and distribution of affordable housing stock, major services such as hospitals, public transport, community health centres, and local government are more accessible the closer a person lives to Melbourne. Many older people, who have lived their whole lives in inner ring suburbs such as Port Melbourne and Richmond, have been forced to the outer suburbs away from their traditional communities and the better public infrastructure¹⁴.

National Seniors recognises the *Victorian Homelessness Strategy*, which has a number of targeted initiatives and projects to specifically respond to client groups with a high propensity to sustained homelessness. One of these groups is older persons at risk of eviction from private rental. However, more obviously needs to be done in this area. In particular, access to, and availability of, public housing needs to be addressed.

It is recommended that the Victorian Government:

- ***Take appropriate and timely measures to increase the stock of available affordable housing.***
- ***Ensure that a suitable proportion of the total affordable housing stock is appropriate to the needs of older people in terms of location, ease of physical access, maintenance and safety and security measures and that it is located close to an appropriate range of services, facilities, transport and recreational opportunities.***

¹³ HAGG. 2003. *Older Tenants Housing Charter*. Available at: <http://www.older tenants.org.au/Charter.pdf>

¹⁴ Ibid.

- ***Ensure that there is a range of affordable housing for older people providing a choice of housing types, styles and tenure arrangements with all forms of tenure being covered by strong consumer protection provisions.***
- ***Ensure adequate support is provided for people ageing at home.***
- ***Consider providing relocation allowances to older people downsizing to more suitable accommodation to assist in offsetting associated costs.***

3.7 Environment

There is growing awareness and concern amongst older people about the environment, and how human activity has impacted upon it. Central to the environment debate is the issue of human induced climate change, in particular its effects, including: species extinction; sudden shifts in weather patterns; drought; rising sea levels; population displacement; and disease. Older Australians have strongly expressed a desire to leave behind a sustainable planet for future generations, and to be fully engaged in the environmental debate.

It is recommended that the Victorian Government:

- ***Take a leadership role on environmental issues including the development of future policies and initiatives to maintain a sustainable planet.***