

NATIONAL SENIORS AUSTRALIA

NSW Election Platform 2007



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About us

National Seniors is the largest senior's organisation in Australia with over 280,000 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 its members views to Government at all levels; and
- to make donations and provide service and advice to charitable institutions assisting people over 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 seniors in Australia.

Policies are developed based on membership input, including through branches and member organisation forums and has a pre-eminent role in representing, advocating for, and serving, senior Australians.

The **National Policy Office (NPO)** based in Canberra, facilitates National Seniors overall policy agenda at the national, state and territory levels. The NPO prepares submissions to government inquiries and lobbies government on issues of importance to seniors.

Our **National, State and Territory Policy Groups** provide the framework within which members raise ideas and issues and determine new policies. Members benefit from the knowledge and experience of our Policy Group representatives on a broad range of policy areas including: aged care; age discrimination; health services; retirement incomes; transport services; and mature age employment.

National Seniors has developed a **National Policy Document** outlining our policy priorities. Furthermore, the NPO works closely with the **National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre** in informing the research agenda and the policy development process.

National Seniors continues to be actively involved in advocating for and on behalf of the needs, rights and interests of seniors on issues relating to the wellbeing of, and justice for, all seniors.

National Seniors Policy Priorities for the 2007 State Election

National Seniors' NSW State Policy Group has developed seven key policy platforms within the framework of our National Policy Document (2006) for the upcoming NSW election. National Seniors calls on NSW political parties to consider the following platforms when developing policies that concern seniors:

1. **Seniors Card**
Support reciprocal travel arrangements through the Seniors Card concessions program
2. **Oral Health**
Improve funding and training for oral health care provision to enable greater access to preventative care
3. **Aged Care**
Provide leadership for the establishment and development of new aged care facilities in NSW
4. **Image of Seniors**
Build a more positive image of seniors and increase recognition of their contributions within the broader community
5. **Mental Health**
Contribute to the reduction of social isolation by improving support services for seniors with mental illness
6. **Transport**
Remove disincentives on seniors' travel; in particular abolish the current 15% booking tax on travel vouchers for pensioners
7. **Environment**
Develop policies that address climate change and water shortages in order to create a sustainable environment for future generations

Key Facts about National Seniors in NSW

- 33% of NSW's population, or 2.2 million people, are over 50 years old
- The 55-70 age-cohort in NSW is predicted to increase by 40.7% over the next six years¹
- National Seniors has approximately 75, 000 members in NSW
- National Seniors has 43 branches in NSW, which provide social and educational opportunities and form the foundation of National Seniors' grassroots policy development process
- The NSW State Policy Group was appointed at the end of 2006 to provide a framework within which members can raise issues and determine new policies. Members of the group have vast experience across the public service, health and private sector

¹ Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC), Media Release, 1st September 2006

Platform 1

Implementing a Nationwide Transport Reciprocity Scheme for Seniors

Why does NSW need to support a nationwide Seniors Card?

- Currently, government Seniors Card holders travelling outside their home state are required to pay full fare on public transport. National Seniors believes these arrangements are inappropriate and create disincentives for seniors to travel interstate
- National Seniors is asking NSW to provide support and leadership in putting this issue back on the national agenda for 2007

What are the benefits to Seniors?

- National Seniors' members in NSW and seniors across Australia continue to lobby for interstate travel concessions
- A nationwide transport reciprocity scheme would allow seniors to use public transport between and within states at concessional rates

What are the benefits to Government and the community?

- Reciprocal travel concessions would remove a major disincentive to interstate travel amongst NSW seniors and bolster NSW's tourism dollar
- National Seniors would be pleased to assist the NSW Government in facilitating the development of a nationwide Seniors Card scheme

Platform 2

Improving Seniors' Oral Health

Why does NSW need to focus on Seniors' oral health care?

- NSW's adult oral health care situation has deteriorated considerably. From a national perspective, Australia has the second worst level of adult oral health of all OECD countries. Access to oral health care in Australia is becoming increasingly difficult. ACOSS² estimates that overall, 40% of Australian adults cannot get the dental treatment they require when they need it

² Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS). 2006. *Fair Dental Care For Low Income Earners. National report on the state of dental care Info Paper*. Available at: http://www.acoss.org.au/upload/publications/papers/1562_Fair%20dental%20care_%20final.pdf.

- The majority of oral health problems are preventable. This is pertinent considering the link between oral health and general health. Whilst 73% of all Australian adults visited a dentist in the last two years, nearly half visited for a problem rather than a check up³
- As more people retain their natural teeth, there is a consequent increase in the need for preventive dental treatment over many more years of life, with more than 60% of the population over 65 years now having one or more natural teeth⁴

What are the benefits to Seniors?

- Increased funding for the training of dental professionals and other allied health care professionals would help support preventative oral health care and education amongst seniors
- Increased funding and training of dental professionals would also assist seniors in rural areas of NSW to have better access to oral health services

What are the benefits to the Government and community?

- Preventive health measures are clearly more effective than resorting to treatment after a problem occurs
- Improved oral health can result in improved general health, thus resulting in increased health care savings across the board

Platform 3 **Leadership in Aged Care**

Why does NSW need to take initiative in providing aged care?

- Whilst the Commonwealth Government has prime responsibility for allocating and funding new high-care aged facilities, it is the role of the states and territories to ensure that these new facilities are developed in a timely manner and sited in appropriate locations, close to shops and support services
- Unfortunately, Local Government has been forced to provide the strategic planning function for the design and siting of new aged care facilities in NSW (which it is not resourced to do so) often results in confusion, red tape and additional cost for aged care service providers

³ Ibid

⁴ Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA). 2006. *Oral Health Policy*. Available at: <http://www.phaa.net.au/policy/contents.htm>. Accessed 2 November 2006.

- National Seniors believes that the NSW Government should provide leadership and work closely with the Commonwealth Government regarding new aged care bed allocations, and provide the overarching strategic planning function for the siting of aged care facilities in the state

What are the benefits to seniors?

- Seniors would be provided with new aged care facilities in a timely manner and located in more appropriate areas

What are the benefits to Government and the community?

- A more strategic and coordinated approach led by the NSW Government would result in a broad range of economic benefits to the state through: a more strategic approach to the determination of new aged care bed allocations; improved siting of aged care facilities; and a reduction in 'red tape' in the overall planning system

Platform 4

Improving the Image of Seniors

Why does NSW need to assist in improving the image of Seniors?

- Seniors can often be portrayed negatively, when in fact, they participate actively and productively within the NSW community. It is therefore vital that they receive adequate recognition for their contributions, which through volunteering add several billion dollars annually to the economy⁵

What are the benefits to Seniors?

- Promoting positive images of seniors supports their contribution to the broader community, whether it be through work, learning, volunteering or community activities⁶

What are the benefits to Government and the community?

- Portraying seniors in a positive and productive light recognises their contribution to the economic, social and cultural growth of NSW

⁵ Ironmonger, D. S. (2000). Measuring volunteering in economic terms. *Volunteers and volunteering*. J. Warbuton and M. Oppenheimer. Australia, Federation Press: 56-72.

⁶ National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre. 2006. www.productiveageing.com.au

Platform 5

Recognising Seniors' Mental Health Needs

Why does NSW need to improve seniors' mental health service provision?

- Studies show that mental illness and depression amongst seniors is often misdiagnosed as old age or dementia, thus misrepresenting the real facts about seniors' mental health⁷

What are the benefits to Seniors?

- Providing opportunities and support for seniors to communicate their mental health needs will assist in reducing social isolation and improve the delivery of mental health services

What are the benefits to Government and the community?

- Improving follow up care within the community through, for example, the sufferer's family or general practitioner, would help greatly to ensure overall wellbeing and prevent relapses of mental illness amongst NSW seniors

Platform 6

Transport for Seniors

Why does NSW need to improve transport arrangements for Seniors?

- Many NSW seniors rely upon public and community transport
- Accessible, affordable and reliable transport is vital for continued community participation and healthy and productive ageing
- The 15% booking fee on so-called 'free' travel vouchers for pensioners introduced by the current NSW Government hurts some of the neediest people in the state

What are the benefits to Seniors?

- Removing the 15% booking fee on travel vouchers would be of great benefit to disadvantaged seniors in NSW

⁷ Leo, D., Hickey, P., Neulinger, K. and Cantor, C. 2001. *Ageing and Suicide*. Australian Institute of Suicide Research and Prevention. Department of Health and Aged Care: Canberra.

What are the benefits to Government and the community?

- Improving access to, and delivery of, transport services to seniors in NSW bolsters domestic tourism and promotes social justice ideals
- Easy access to transport reduces the risk of social isolation amongst seniors, which in turn reduces the possibility of contracting further physical and mental health problems

Platform 7 **Environment and Seniors**

Why does NSW need to include seniors in the environmental policy debate?

- There is a growing awareness amongst the world's population about the issues of climate change and future water supply
- Climate change is an issue of great concern to National Seniors' 75,000 NSW members, and has been repeatedly brought to our attention through our grassroots policy process. The scientific evidence is overwhelming: climate change is a serious global threat, and it demands an urgent global response⁸

What are the benefits to NSW Seniors?

- Reassurance that the environment will remain in a safe, habitable and sustainable state for future generations

What are the benefits to the NSW Government and community?

- Living in a healthier and more sustainable environment with more stable weather conditions and a reduced threat of drought and bushfires
- Greater community awareness and understanding of how individuals can help negate the effects of climate change and water shortages
- National Seniors would be pleased to work with NSW in developing an environmental initiative involving seniors

⁸ Stern. N, 2006, *Summary of Conclusions* in "Stern Review On The Economics of Climate Change", London, HM Treasury