

FEDERAL ELECTION 2019

Policy priorities of older Australians



National Seniors
AUSTRALIA

Contents

Foreword	3
Older Australians	4
Recommendations	5
Initiative #1 Fix pension poverty	6
Initiative #2 Address aged care deficiencies	8
Initiative #3 Maintain fairness in retirement incomes	10
Initiative #4 Arrest rising health costs.....	12
Initiative #5 Protect pensioners from future rises in energy costs	14
Initiative #6 Reduce Centrelink wait times	15
Initiative #7 Protect older Australians from elder abuse	16
Infographics	17
References	18

Foreword

National Seniors is fighting for a better deal for all older Australians.

In the 2019 federal election, older Australians will play an important role in determining who will govern Australia. Almost a third of all voters in Australia are aged over 60. Their issues cannot be ignored.

National Seniors Australia is the independent voice of older Australians. With a 40-year plus record of successfully advocating for seniors, we are well placed to give voice to the needs and aspirations of older Australians.

Older Australians want strong and effective government. They want a government that represents the interests of all Australians, one that makes prudent policy decisions based on solid research and assess all possible impacts.

Older Australians are keen to continue their lifelong contribution to society. To enable this, they need clear and consistent rules and regulations, particularly with regard to retirement income, superannuation and taxation, and adequate supports and safety nets for those who are less fortunate.

In this election, National Seniors is calling on all political parties to adopt policies that address the following key areas of concern:

- Pension poverty
- Health costs
- Aged care
- Retirement incomes.

National Seniors is calling for an Independent Age Pension Tribunal to take the politics out of the pension, and for increased financial assistance for older people to access the rental market, the NBN and dental care.

We are calling for spiralling out-of-pocket health care costs to be curtailed through greater transparency of specialist fees and by limiting increases to private health insurance premiums.

National Seniors is also calling for swift action to address the crisis in aged care by tripling level 3 and 4 home care packages to eliminate waiting lists, mandating publication of staffing levels in residential care, and making dementia training mandatory for all people in direct aged care roles.

We want to see a stronger retirement income system that encourages people to save and be self-reliant. We are calling on all parties and candidates to reject moves to strip franking credit refunds, commit to reducing the asset test taper rate from \$3.00 to \$2.00, and support a scheme to enable low-wealth downsizers to put excess home sale proceeds (up to \$250,000) into superannuation without affecting their pension.

National Seniors is also calling for the reintroduction of the indexation of the Energy Supplement, improvements to Centrelink waiting and processing times, and a stronger commitment to combating financial elder abuse.

These policies are an investment in the health, wellbeing and productivity of older people across our nation.

At this election National Seniors calls on all parties to address the record levels of distrust, disengagement, scepticism and cynicism about our political processes. Whoever wins this year's election must work to restore voters' faith in the idea that government is there to facilitate ongoing improvement in people's lives, including those of senior Australians.



Ian Henschke (Chief Advocate)



John McCallum (Chief Executive Officer)

Older Australians

**Older Australians make up
a large proportion of voters¹**

1 in 3 = voters aged 60 and over

5 million = voters aged 60 and over

**Pension recipients aged
65 and over²**

1 million = Part Age Pension

1.5 million = Full Age Pension



Recommendations

Initiative #1: Fix pension poverty

1. Establish an Independent Age Pension Tribunal.
2. Increase the maximum rate of Commonwealth Rent Assistance.
3. Provide a subsidy to connect to the NBN or another appropriate internet service.
4. Expand the provision of basic dental care for pensioners, including those in aged care.

Initiative #2: Address aged care deficiencies

5. Triple the number of level 3 and 4 home care packages.
6. Require all aged care providers to publish staff-to-resident ratios.
7. Ensure all aged care staff in direct care roles have basic dementia training.

Initiative #3: Maintain fairness in retirement incomes

8. Retain access to franking credit refunds for all retirees.
9. Reduce the asset test taper rate from \$3.00 to \$2.00.
10. Exempt up to \$250,000 of home sale proceeds from the Age Pension means test.

Initiative #4: Arrest rising health costs

11. Require all specialists to publish fees on a public register and ensure all GPs make patients aware of choice when referring to a specialist.
12. Limit private health insurance premium increases to no more than CPI until reforms take effect.

Initiative #5: Protect pensioners from future rises in energy costs

13. Reinstatement of the Energy Supplement.

Initiative #6: Improve Centrelink wait times

14. Cut Centrelink telephone waiting times for older Australians and reduce Age Pension processing times.

Initiative #7: Protect older Australians from elder abuse

15. Accelerate efforts to create nationally consistent Powers of Attorney legislation and a single national register for these documents.

Initiative #1

Fix pension poverty

National Seniors has partnered with the Benevolent Society to fight for a fair go for people reliant on the Age Pension.

What's needed

1. Establish an Independent Age Pension Tribunal.
2. Increase the maximum rate of Commonwealth Rent Assistance.
3. Provide a subsidy to connect to the NBN or another appropriate internet service.
4. Expand the provision of basic dental care for pensioners, including those in aged care.

Pension spending as a proportion of GDP:

AUSTRALIA

4.3%



OECD AVERAGE

8.2%



Pension vs Rental Costs

	Single	Couple
Pension	\$453.15	\$690.70
Max CRA*	\$67.90	\$128.00
Pension + CRA*	\$521.05	\$818.70
Weekly rent (median)	\$373	\$440
Housing as % of income	71.6%	53.7%

Figure 1: Pension spending

The issues

Australians want a fair go for pensioners.

The pension simply doesn't provide enough for older Australians to live even a basic but decent life.

More than half a million people rely on the pension as their sole source of income. A single older person reliant on the pension survives on an annual income of around \$24,000; a couple around \$36,000. We know many people in this situation are struggling.

It's time to take the politics out of the pension. Older Australians are sick and tired of being subjected to ongoing attack by governments attempting to 'balance the books'.

Older renters are particularly hard hit, especially those who live alone.

While many older Australians own their own home, around 15% do not³. These older people have not been able to secure the Australian dream and must seek shelter through the private rental market.

Unfortunately, that market is often unaffordable. Rental costs have increased significantly over the past 10 years. While rents increased 29% over that period⁴, Commonwealth Rent Assistance increased by only 23%⁵. This exposed older people to higher costs, lower living standards and increased risk of homelessness.

Without access to the internet, older people will be disadvantaged.

The ongoing rollout of the NBN combined with the shift to a digital world is an exciting opportunity for Australia. The government's Digital Transformation Strategy aims to have all government services available through online channels by 2025⁶. However, many people simply can't afford it. The increased cost of the NBN is posing significant barriers for many older Australians.

Older people are also faced with the prospect of being forced to sign up to the more expensive NBN services simply to continue accessing a landline even if they don't want or need the internet.

Dentistry is an essential part of health care, yet it's not treated that way.

While dental care is essential to health and wellbeing, the cost of basic care has been largely privatised. Those able to afford private health insurance receive rebates when accessing private dental services; those without either foot the bill themselves or rely on overstretched and underfunded public dental services. Those in aged care have almost no access to dental care.

It is abhorrent that a country with a first-rate public health system like Australia has neglected this vital issue.

The solutions

Establish an Independent Age Pension Tribunal.

An Independent Age Pension Tribunal is the first step to a fairer retirement income system that meets the needs of all Australians.

An Independent Age Pension Tribunal would take responsibility for calculating a fair and adequate pension rate. It would work out the pension rate and any supplements based on need and circumstance. Its decisions would be accepted without debate in the same way monetary policy is set by the Reserve Bank. The Tribunal would hand down its determination every November to provide enough time to be accounted for in the May Budget⁷.

Increase the maximum rate of Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA).

Increasing the maximum rate of the CRA is an important way to address housing poverty in Australia.

The maximum rate of the CRA could be lifted to a proportion of average housing costs in a specific region. Clear evidence shows that housing costs in highly urban areas are much higher than in other areas. Ultimately, the maximum rate of CRA should be set by the Independent Age Pension Tribunal so pensioners who rent receive enough income to meet reasonable living costs, no matter where they live.

Provide a subsidy to connect to the NBN or another appropriate internet service.

The internet is an essential service. Older Australians should be connected.

Access to the NBN will ensure older people can maintain a landline, give them access to essential services, enable them to stay in touch with family and friends, and offer new ways to stay socially connected and engaged. It is vital to provide an adequate subsidy for those who can't afford it. This could be done by increasing the Centrelink Telephone Allowance, which could be determined by the Independent Age Pension Tribunal. Alternatively, government could mandate that a basic low-cost broadband service be offered through the NBN as recommended by the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN).

Expand the provision of basic dental care for pensioners, including those in aged care.

Maintaining dental health will improve wellbeing and reduce health costs for older people.

A healthy mouth enables people to eat, speak and socialise without pain, discomfort or embarrassment. Poor oral health is also linked to chronic diseases, including stroke and cardiovascular disease. Good oral health lessens the incidence of other health conditions, reducing hospital admissions and saving the health budget many millions of dollars.

A universal dental health care scheme, based on the Child Dental Benefits Schedule (CDBS), could provide pensioners without private health cover an annual subsidy to help maintain their dental health. It would be especially useful to those living in aged care.

Initiative #2

Address aged care deficiencies

The aged care system is failing Australian families. Government must repair and boost home and residential aged care and safeguard the health, safety, dignity and wellbeing of older Australians.

What's needed

5. Triple the number of level 3 and 4 home care packages.
6. Require all aged care providers to publish staff-to-resident ratios.
7. Ensure all aged care staff in direct care roles have basic dementia training.

12
months
PLUS

Estimated maximum wait time for a level 2, 3 and 4 home care package (30 Sep 2018)

Total number of people waiting for a home care package suitable to their needs (30 Sep 2018)	126,732
Number of people waiting for a level 3 home care package (30 Sep 2018)	41,937
Number of people waiting for a level 4 home care package (30 Sep 2018)	50,065

Figure 2: Home care wait times

The issues

The failings of the aged care system are top of mind for older Australians. Many come into direct contact with the system through personal experience and through family and loved ones who are accessing care.

Growing dissatisfaction with the system is clear – as evidenced by the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. Urgent action is needed to improve the aged care system. Doing so will take pressure off other taxpayer-supported services, including hospitals.

More than 1.3 million people receive aged care services⁸. By 2050 this number is expected to rise to more than 3.5 million⁹. The ageing population and the associated increasing number of people with dementia are two factors driving increased demand for aged care services.

The number of people requiring home care packages is outstripping supply, resulting in unacceptable waiting times.

More than 92,000 older Australians are waiting for level 3 and 4 packages. Of these, more than 42,000 have no interim level home care¹⁰. National Seniors continues to hear of cases where people on the waiting list died before they received any assistance. Others were forced into residential care prematurely because their carers couldn't cope. We have members telling us of parents who are aged in their late 90s or are even 100+ who aren't receiving home care despite being approved for it.

Feedback from National Seniors members highlights the link between quality of care and staffing in residential aged care.

Many of our members are concerned about the skills and qualifications of staff and the number of staff available in residential aged care. Our members want to see minimum staffing ratios instituted. At the very least, they should know how many staff will be available to meet their care needs and the skill levels of staff available when choosing a residential care home.

It is unacceptable aged care staff are not required to be trained and qualified in caring for people with dementia.

Clearly there is a need for enhanced, and mandatory, training in this area. In 2018, an estimated 376,300 Australians had dementia, nearly half of whom were aged 85 years and over. This number is anticipated to grow to around 900,000 by 2050. At 30 June 2018, over half of all residential aged care residents with an Aged Care Funding Instrument (ACFI) assessment had a diagnosis of dementia¹¹. Recent evidence suggests a high rate of underdiagnosis.

The solutions

Triple the number of level 3 and 4 home care packages.

Australians want to age in their home.

The queue for accessing home care is a running sore and a profound policy failure. Currently 12,693 people have a level 3 and 22,817 people a level 4 home care package. At the same time there are 41,937 people waiting for a level 3 and 50,065 waiting for a level 4 home care package¹².

Tripling the number of level 3 and 4 home care packages would largely eliminate the current waiting list and improve the quality of life for people waiting for care. Unfortunately, too many people are dying waiting to receive the level of care they require.

Tripling the number of level 3 and 4 packages available would stop more older people from being forced into residential care. This is important because residential care results in declining health and also greater expense to the public purse than home care.

Increased spending on additional home care packages is an investment in budget management and reflects what people want.

Require that all aged care providers publish staff-to-resident ratios.

Publishing staff-to-resident ratios will improve quality and safety for people in residential aged care.

Providers should be aware of the number of staff, and skills and qualifications, relative to the number of residents in their facility. We expect this is already done on a routine basis as part of day-to-day workforce planning. Obliging all providers to publish staffing ratios on a regular basis would entrench this important practice within aged care homes.

This information should be published and regularly updated on the My Aged Care website, so consumers are better informed when choosing a home. It would provide consumers with a better idea about the level of nursing care they are likely to receive. Consumers with acute care needs would likely avoid homes that do not provide adequate numbers of staff with appropriate qualifications.

Ensure all aged care staff in direct care roles have basic dementia training.

National Seniors believes the quality of care for older Australians with dementia would be enhanced by this initiative. It formed a key part of our submission to the Royal Commission and is a widely-held view among other respected organisations, such as Dementia Australia.

Working with dementia sufferers requires specialised skills and understanding. Mandating basic dementia training for all staff would improve the capacity of staff to care for people with dementia. Appropriately trained staff would better manage dementia symptoms, help ease the high incidence of conflict in residential care settings, and assist in the reduction of physical and chemical restraints, which are currently overused.

Initiative #3

Maintain fairness in retirement incomes

National Seniors is fighting for policies that create a fairer and stronger retirement system for all older Australians.

What's needed:

8. Retain access to franking credit refunds for all retirees.
9. Reduce the asset test taper rate from \$3.00 to \$2.00.
10. Exempt up to \$250,000 of home sale proceeds from the Age Pension means test.

Downsizing



1 in 5 older Australians who don't want to downsize would consider doing so if the extra money did not affect their pension.

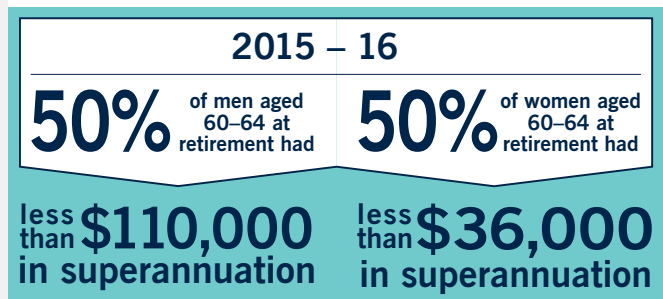


Figure 3: Downsizing and super rates

The issues

Australians want a retirement system that encourages self-reliance and also provides stability of income.

Self-funded retirees should not be unfairly punished by changing rules.

Self-funded retirees, many of whom do not have significant incomes, are tired of being targeted as a source of revenue by government. They have taken on significant risk, making investments in Australian companies and the Australian economy through the share market to secure a reasonable future. They have become self-funded by working within the existing rules. They are facing significant loss of income if franking credit refunds are withdrawn. What is most unfair about the policy is the way it targets only one type of self-funded retiree. Those using self-managed funds will lose their refunds while those in large superannuation funds will retain the benefits.

Many will be forced to restructure their investments and withdraw from investing in Australian companies. Some will fall back on the Age Pension. This change will impact on the federal budget and the economy more generally.

Retirees should not be unfairly penalised for saving for their retirement.

In 2017, around 90,000 older Australians lost access to the Age Pension through changes to the asset test and taper rate¹³. The change in the taper rate from \$1.50 to \$3.00 per \$1,000 of assets has undermined the value of saving for retirement. Retirees close to the cut-off for the pension are now paying a wealth tax because their assets are not able to earn as much as they lose in pension.

This creates a disincentive to save and encourages people on the cusp of being self-funded to spend their wealth to achieve the pension and the many savings associated with the Australian Government Pensioner Concession Card.

Pensioners with limited wealth should be able to boost their income through downsizing.

Older people are reluctant to downsize and make better use of the wealth locked up in their family home. Many have limited wealth outside of their home and would benefit if they could access some of these funds to supplement the Age Pension. National Seniors research shows many seniors want to downsize, but the impact on the pension (combined with the cost of stamp duty and moving) creates a major financial disincentive¹⁴.

Many would also benefit from downsizing because they live in housing that is inappropriate for their needs as they age and expensive to maintain. For frail older people, inappropriate housing can lead to added risks of injury and hospitalisation, which precipitates early entry into residential aged care. While people aged 65 and over are now able to make a non-concessional contribution into superannuation of up to \$300,00 from selling their home, the impact on the pension continues to pose a barrier to this policy.

The solutions

Retain access to franking credit refunds for all retirees.

All self-funded retirees want is to be treated fairly. Self-funded retirees are tired of the rules constantly changing. They are disappointed that political parties think it's fair to apply rules indiscriminately to one type of retiree but not another. We call on all political parties and independent candidates to reject the proposal to strip self-funded retirees of franking credit refunds.

Retaining access to franking credit refunds will ensure that the rules apply equally to all retirees regardless of the way their retirement assets are managed, ensuring ongoing investment in Australia by Australians.

“We have worked hard and saved for our self-funded retirement, only to see the goal posts moved continually.”

840,000

Estimated number of self-funded retirees who would be affected by scrapping franking credit refunds

Figure 4: Retirement regulations

Reduce the asset test taper rate from \$3.00 to \$2.00.

Reducing the taper rate to \$2.00 will make it more attractive for people to save for retirement.

Reducing the taper rate will take away the strong incentive to spend money just to get the Age Pension and its associated benefits. While it will increase the number of people eligible for a part-pension, it will improve the capacity of retirees to sustain higher incomes for longer, taking pressure off government spending in the longer term. Ultimately, it will improve the quality of life for those affected.

Exempt up to \$250,000 of home sale proceeds from the Age Pension means test.

Encouraging downsizing will have multiple economic and social benefits.

It will unlock large sums of wealth tied up in the family home, increase retirement incomes, boost the construction of new housing, free up older stock, and improve health and wellbeing outcomes for older people. These include enhancing personal safety, health, social inclusion, and facilitating easier access to lifestyle options and services.

Excess funds would be deposited into a superannuation account where they could be used to boost income or be drawn on as a lump sum to pay for age-friendly home modifications, health and aged care costs, installation of solar power or other activities that improve self-sufficiency in retirement.

Initiative #4

Arrest rising health costs

Spiralling out-of-pocket health care costs are the single biggest concern of older Australians.

What's needed

11. Require all specialists to publish fees on a public register and ensure all GPs make patients aware of choice when referring to a specialist.
12. Limit private health insurance premium increases to no more than CPI until reforms take effect.

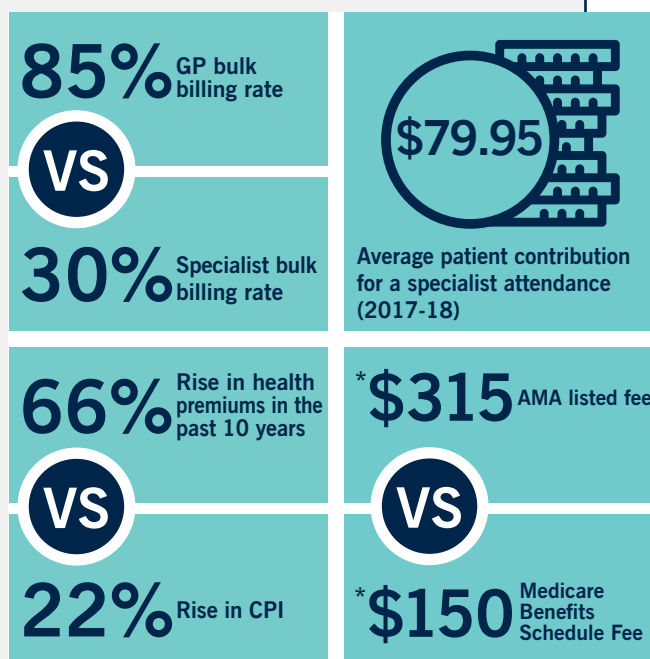


Figure 5: Health costs

The issues

Health care costs are increasing at a rate far above inflation fuelled by the rising cost of health insurance and private specialists, which is exacerbated by a general lack of transparency in the private health care market.

People on low and fixed incomes are particularly hard hit and defer medical treatment or cut back their private health cover when faced with crippling costs.

Specialists' fees are not affordable or transparent.

Specialists can charge what they like. Specialists' fees have risen faster than the Medicare rebate. Some specialists are reported to be charging 10 times above the AMA-recommended price. Bulk billing rates for specialist attendances is only 30%, leaving most people with significant out-of-pocket expenses, even when private health rebates are available.

Compounding this is a lack of market transparency, 'hidden' fees, and consumer confusion. Comparing medical specialist fees and services is nigh impossible for most consumers. Patients are often uncomfortable questioning the advice of a GP, which means they can often be reluctant to shop around.

Older Australians are struggling to pay rising health insurance premiums.

Private insurance premiums increased by 66% in the past 10 years. Private health care is becoming less affordable with many people downgrading or cancelling their cover.

While much of this is driven by rising specialist fees, it is not helped by private health insurance policies being confusing and difficult to compare. The growing number of policy exclusions also contributes to the declining affordability of health care.

Government has implemented several reforms that will hopefully reduce premiums. Reforming the prosthesis list, providing discounts for younger people, enabling higher excesses (in lieu of lower premiums) and introducing standardised tiers to make comparison easier are all intended to reduce premiums. However, it remains to be seen how much impact these reforms will have.

While waiting for reforms to take effect, older people are forced to make a difficult choice between equally unacceptable options. Either they keep their current level of insurance and wear the increased costs, downgrade their coverage and face greater out-of-pocket costs when something goes wrong, or drop their policies altogether and face waiting to access care in the public system.

The solutions

Require all specialists to publish fees on a public register and ensure all GPs make patients aware of choice when referring to a specialist.

Comparing medical specialist fees and services is very difficult for most consumers. When faced with a pressing health issue most consumers just want to get quality treatment as quickly as possible. However, seeing a health professional is not like buying a new car. Timeliness of treatment can make an enormous difference to someone's wellbeing. In some instances, this can be a matter of life and death.

Even though most people place their health and wellbeing above monetary concerns, cost is still an important factor. Private health treatment costs can be significant. Yet there is often little understanding of these costs.

Whoever forms government should require that all medical specialists publish their fees on a public register. This will provide patients with an easy way to assess and compare the potential costs of visiting a specialist.

We also believe GPs should be required to inform patients about choice when referring to a medical specialist. This will increase the likelihood that patients will explore their options, rather than just accept a GP's recommendation.

Limit private health insurance premium increases to no more than CPI until reforms take effect.

To address the risk of declining private health coverage requires strong government action. Reform is occurring, but for many this reform is too little, too late.

A survey of National Seniors members in late 2017 found that reducing private health insurance premiums would be the single most beneficial action that would assist our members to meet their health care needs. This is unsurprising given almost 85% of respondents held private health insurance.

While premiums will only increase by an average of 3.25% in 2019, this is well above the overall rate of inflation of 1.8% (to Dec. 2018). Part of the problem is the ongoing rise in health costs. Compared to CPI, health costs increased by 3.3%, nearly double inflation.

Whoever forms government should make a commitment to hold any future increase in premiums to no more than overall inflation. This would put downward pressure on spiralling health insurance costs, stem the departure of policy holders, and encourage insurers to develop insurance products that offer better value for money.

Government cannot continue to allow health premiums to escalate at odds with other parts of the economy. Holding down premium increases will send a message to the health sector that they, too, must adopt reforms to drive down the cost of health care.

Initiative #5

Protect pensioners from future rises in energy costs

Pensioners continue to be hit hard by escalating energy prices.

What's needed

13. Reinstate indexation of the Energy Supplement.

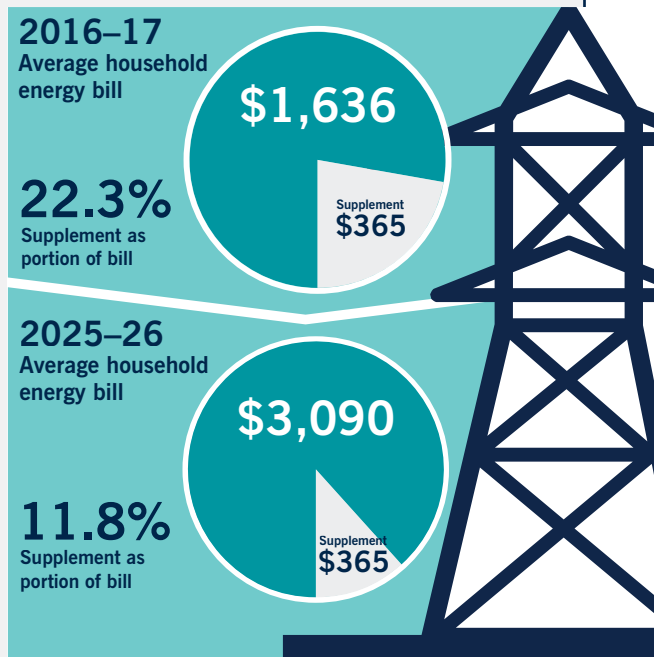


Figure 6: Energy costs

The issue

In a modern society, access to affordable energy is an essential to quality of life. Unfortunately, energy prices have been increasing at rates far above inflation over the past 10 years.

Those on low incomes feel the impact of excessive cost increases because energy makes up a larger proportion of their income. Pensioners should be able to keep warm in winter and cool in summer, without negatively impacting their capacity to afford other essentials, such as food, clothing and shelter. Government has not done enough to protect older consumers from these price pressures.

The solution

Reinstate indexation of the Energy Supplement.

National Seniors fought for the retention of the Energy Supplement for new pension recipients. We fought for this because we know how important this payment is to low-income retirees. National Seniors is now calling for changes to the way the Energy Supplement is calculated to ensure it is effective when energy prices increase. The simplest way to do this is to reapply indexation to the existing Energy Supplement.

Without indexation, pensioners will continue to see the value of the supplement diminish over time. Indexing the Energy Supplement in line with the energy component of CPI will help low-income households meet rising energy costs. Importantly, it will also encourage government to take ongoing action to keep energy prices stable.

Initiative #6

Reduce Centrelink wait times

Excessive wait times for essential services such as Centrelink are unacceptable.

What's needed

14. Cut Centrelink telephone waiting times for older Australians and reduce Age Pension processing times.

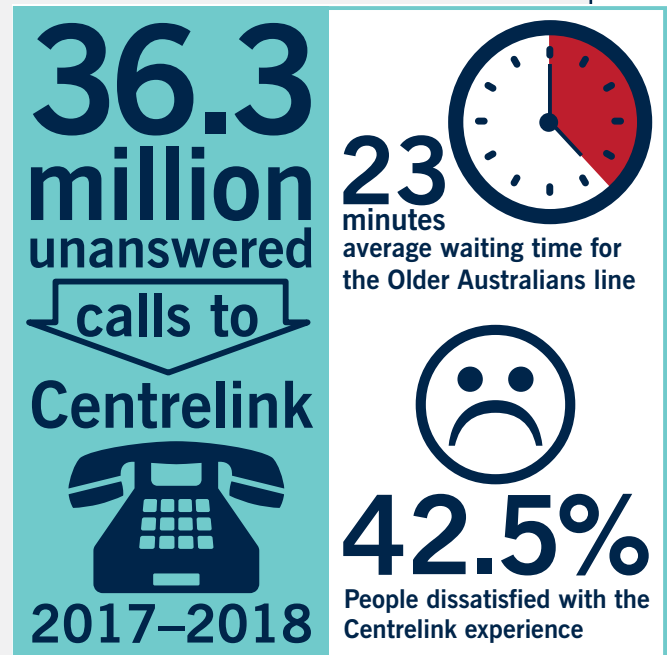


Figure 7: Centrelink wait times

The issue

Telephone waiting times and Age Pension processing times are unnecessarily long. This causes significant problems for older Australians who are waiting extraordinary periods to receive basic government services to which they are entitled.

The solution

Cut Centrelink telephone waiting times for older Australians and reduce Age Pension processing times.

It is unacceptable that older Australians are being forced to wait to receive essential services. Adequate funding is required to ensure that Centrelink can service customers' needs in a timely manner. National Seniors calls on the federal government to ensure that call waiting and processing times for Centrelink meet community expectations so that older Australians can access services and assistance in a timely manner.

The poor performance of Centrelink can be seen clearly when compared to other government services such as the Australian Tax Office (ATO). On average, Centrelink answered calls in 15 minutes and 58 seconds in 2017-18¹⁵ and had an estimated 61.2% of calls go unanswered¹⁶. In comparison, the ATO answered over 81% of general calls within five minutes in 2017-18 with only 12% of calls unanswered¹⁷. Clearly Centrelink has a long way to go to improve its performance to the standard expected of other government services.

Initiative #7

Enhance elder abuse protections

No older person should suffer abuse.

What's needed

15. Accelerate efforts to create nationally consistent Powers of Attorney legislation and a single national register for these documents.

“Financial abuse appears to be the most common form of abuse experienced by elderly people.”

2%
to
14%



Proportion of older people estimated to have experienced financial elder abuse in a given year (the incidence of neglect is potentially higher)

Figure 8: Elder abuse

The issue

Elder abuse is a growing concern for older Australians.

Financial elder abuse is the most common form of abuse experienced by older people. It is often implicated as a factor in other forms of abuse, such as physical and emotional abuse and neglect.

Financial abuse can occur because older people do not have access to tools that help protect them. In other instances, these same tools enable abuse to occur. Powers of Attorney, for example, can be misused if there are inadequate checks and balances.

The solution

Accelerate efforts to create nationally consistent Powers of Attorney legislation and a single national register for these documents.

A lack of consistency between states and territories is undermining legal protections for older Australians. While the banking and financial services sector is regulated nationally, states and territories make laws governing the use of Powers of Attorney documents. These documents can be used to appoint someone to manage the financial affairs of a person who is not able to do so on their own.

Creating nationally-consistent legislation with stronger protections against misuse, and a national register for these documents, will increase safeguards for older Australians, making it easier to detect and stop abuse. This has been agreed to by all levels of government but action on this matter is moving at a glacial pace. We call on whichever party forms government to make this an urgent priority.

Infographics

Figure 1: Pension spending – Aust vs OECD. OECD 2018. *Pension spending (indicator)*.

Accessed on 20 December 2018. <https://data.oecd.org/socialexp/pension-spending.htm>

Note: this includes spending on aged care services.

Pension and CRA rates as at 1 February 2019.

Weekly rent for a single pensioner is based on the national median rent for 2-bedroom units and for a couple is based on the national median rent for 3-bedroom houses as at 20 December 2018. SQM Research 2018. 'Weekly Rents, National' Week ending 20 December 2018 <https://sqmresearch.com.au/weekly-rents.php?national=1&t=1>

Figure 2: Home care wait time – Australian Government Department of Health 2018. *Home Care Packages Program Data Report 4th Quarter 2017-18: 1 April – 30 June 2018 September 2018 (reissued 8 October 2018)* https://www.gen-agedcaredata.gov.au/www_ahwgen/media/Home_care_report/HCP-Data-Report-2017%E2%80%934th-Qtr-revised.pdf

Figure 3: Downsizing and super rates – Rees, K. & McCallum, J. 2017. *Downsizing: Movers, planners, stayers*. Brisbane: National Seniors

Clare, R. 2017. *Superannuation account balances by age and gender*. October 2017, ASFA Research and Resource Centre https://www.superannuation.asn.au/ArticleDocuments/359/1710_Superannuation_account_balances_by_age_and_gender.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y

Figure 4: Retirement regulations – Comment by National Seniors Member Royce W in National Seniors Australia 2018. *Submission to the inquiry into the implications of removing refundable franking credits*. November 2018 <https://nationalseniors.com.au/uploads/NSA-Submission-franking-credits-inquiry-Nov-2018-Final.pdf>

Parliamentary Budget Office 2018. *Policy Costing: Dividend imputation credit refunds* 4 May 2018 <https://www.aph.gov.au/~media/05%20About%20Parliament/54%20Parliamentary%20Depts/548%20Parliamentary%20Budget%20Office/Publicly%20released%20costings/Dividend%20imputation%20credit%20refunds%20-%20DOC.docx?la=en>

Figure 5: Health costs – Department of Health 2018 *Annual Medicare Statistics* Accessed online 7 December 2018 <http://health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/Annual-Medicare-Statistics> Choice 2019 'Private health premium increases announced' Accessed online 8 January 2019 <https://www.choice.com.au/money/insurance/health/articles/health-premium-hikes-on-the-horizon-131115>

Sivey, P. 2016. 'How much?! Seeing private specialists often costs more than you bargained for' in *The Conversation*. 16 March 2016. <https://theconversation.com/how-much-seeing-private-specialists-often-costs-more-than-you-bargained-for-53445>

Figure 6: Energy costs – Estimate of average bill in 2025-26 based on extrapolating ACCC estimate for the average annual bill for 2016-17 using the average annual increase in electricity over previous 10 years (7.3%) from the electricity index of CPI data. Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) 2018. *Restoring electricity affordability and Australia's competitive advantage Retail Electricity Pricing Inquiry—Final Report*. June 2018 and ABS 2019 *Consumer Price Index, Australia, Dec 2018* Cat. no. 6401.0 - TABLE 9. CPI: Group, Sub-group and Expenditure Class, Index Numbers by Capital City.

Figure 7: Centrelink wait times – 2017-18 covers period from 1 July 2017 to 31 March 2018. Commonwealth of Australia 2018. *Official Committee Hansard Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee Estimates* Thursday, 31 May 2018 Canberra. https://www.aph.gov.au/~media/Estimates/ca/bud1819/Hansard/Official/Community%20Affairs%20Legislation%20Committee_2018_05_31_6174_Official.pdf?la=en

National Seniors and Retirement Essentials. 2018. *The Centrelink Experience: From 'waiting, frustrating, hopeless' to 'helpful', friendly, positive'*. Brisbane: National Seniors Australia.

Figure 8: Elder abuse – Kaspiew, R., Carson, R., & Rhoades, H. 2016. *Elder abuse: Understanding issues, frameworks and responses*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies <https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/rr35-elder-abuse-nov18.pdf>

Australian Government Australian Institute of Family Studies 2018. 'Elder Abuse' Accessed online 21 December 2018. <https://aifs.gov.au/publications/elder-abuse/export>

References

1. Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) 2018. *Elector count by division, age group and gender*. 31 December 2018. https://www.aec.gov.au/enrolling_to_vote/enrolment_stats/elector_count/index.htm
2. Department of Social Services (DSS) 2018. *DSS Demographics – September 2018*. Accessed online 14 February 2019. <https://data.gov.au/dataset/ds-dga-cff2ae8a-55e4-47db-a66d-e177fe0ac6a0/details>
3. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2017. *Housing Occupancy and Costs, 2015–16*. Cat. no. 4130.0 – Table 2.1 HOUSEHOLD ESTIMATES ('000), Tenure and landlord type, By selected household characteristics, All households.
4. ABS 2019. *Consumer Price Index, Australia, Dec 2018*. Cat. no. 6401.0 – TABLE 9. CPI: Group, Sub-group and Expenditure Class, Index Numbers by Capital City.
5. Australian Government Department of Social Security 2019. '5.2.6.10 RA Rates – June 1990 to Present Date' in *Social Security Guide* Version 1.52 – Released 4 February 2019 <http://guides.dss.gov.au/guide-social-security-law/5/2/6/10>
6. Australian Government Digital Transformation Agency 2018. *Digital Transformation Strategy*. Accessed online 25 February 2019 <https://www.dta.gov.au/digital-transformation-strategy/ministerial-foreword>
7. Per Capita 2016. *The Adequacy of the Age Pension in Australia: An assessment of pensioner living standards*. September 2016 https://percapita.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Pension-Adequacy_Final.pdf
8. Australian Government Department of Health (DoH) 2018. *2017–18 Report on the Operation of the Aged Care Act 1997*. Canberra.
9. Productivity Commission 2011. *Caring for Older Australians: Overview Report No. 53*, Final Inquiry Report, Canberra.
10. Australian Government Department of Health 2018. Home care packages program Data Report 1st Quarter 2018-19: 1 July – 30 September 2018 November 2018
11. DoH 2018. *Ibid.*
12. DoH 2018. *Ibid.*
13. Parliament of Australia Department of Parliamentary Services 2017. 'Social Services Legislation Amendment (Energy Assistance Payment and Pensioner Concession Card) Bill 2017' in *Bills Digest* No. 109, 14 June 2017.
14. Rees, K. & McCallum, J. 2017. *Downsizing: Movers, planners, stayers*. Brisbane: National Seniors
15. Australian Government Department of Human Services 2018. 'Performance measure results – Social Security and Welfare' in *Department of Human Services: Annual Report 2017–18* <https://www.humanservices.gov.au/organisations/about-us/annual-reports/annual-report-2017-18.html/part-5-report-performance/performance-measure-results-social-security-and-welfare#a12>
16. Estimate for unanswered calls for 2017–18 based on evidence supplied by the Department of Human Services during Senate Estimates for the period of 1 July 2017 – 31 March 2018 in which 36.3 million calls went unanswered and 23.379 million calls were answered. Commonwealth of Australia 2018. *Official Committee Hansard Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee Estimates* Thursday, 31 May 2018 Canberra https://www.aph.gov.au/~media/Estimates/ca/bud1819/Hansard/Official/Community%20Affairs%20Legislation%20Committee_2018_05_31_6174_Official.pdf?la=en
17. Australian Tax Office 2018. 'Service Commitments: Table 5.14 Commitments to service – Timely, 2016–17 and 2017–18' in *ATO Annual Report*. Accessed online 25 February 2019 <https://www.ato.gov.au/About-ATO/Annual-report-2017-18/Part-5-Appendixes/Appendix-6--Service-commitments-and-activities/Service-commitments/>



GPO Box 1450, Brisbane Qld 4001
P: 1300 76 50 50 **F:** 07 3229 0356
E: policy@nationalseniors.com.au
W: nationalseniors.com.au

National Seniors
AUSTRALIA