

Fix Pension Poverty

Dear

I'm a voter in your electorate and I'm writing to let you know that a key issue for me in the federal election is how Australia treats older Australians. I'm one of them and I will vote for the candidate who best enables me and other seniors to be financially independent.

I'm also a member of National Seniors Australia. Through its advocacy and research, National Seniors fights to improve the lives of older Australians; older Australians just like me.

In this election, National Seniors is advocating for policies that reduce pension poverty, improve aged care, maintain fairness in retirement income, reduce energy and health costs, improve Centrelink and stop elder abuse.

Personally, I am especially interested in fixing the terrible conditions faced by many pensioners.

Being on a low and fixed income can mean inescapable poverty. The Aged Pension simply doesn't provide enough money for older Australians to live on. More than half a million people rely on the pension as their sole source of income. People in this situation are struggling.

It is unacceptable that setting a just and fair Age Pension is hindered by political gamesmanship and point-scoring, which has been the case in recent years.

I will vote for candidates who support pensioners and I am asking you to commit to championing the following recommendations from National Seniors.

Establish an Independent Age Pension Tribunal

This initiative will take the politics out of the pension-setting process. The 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 partisan 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 following May budget.

Increase the maximum rate of Commonwealth Rent Assistance.

More than a quarter of a million pensioners don't own their own home. On average, an age pensioner receives only a third of what is needed to pay the rent. Single older women are more likely to be living in poverty and end up homeless. They often have less savings and superannuation because they were out of the paid workforce while looking after children and family.

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

In a world that is increasingly online, pensioners need to have access to an adequate internet services to enable them to receive communications, pay bills, interact with government services and access the wider economy and community. The NBN provides an opportunity to do this but the access costs are too high. Providing a subsidy for the NBN would enable older Australians on low-fixed incomes to be connected and ensure that they are able to access a landline service if they need it.

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

The high cost of dental care is a barrier to maintaining good oral health. Government must find a way to facilitate access to dental care for those who cannot afford it. Creating an adult dental scheme based on the existing Child Dental Benefit Schedule is one way that government could improve access to dental care for those who most need it.

I believe these initiatives will fix pension poverty, and by doing so enhance the health and wellbeing of vulnerable older people. These initiatives will also generate the economic benefit by reducing demand on taxpayer-funded services such as health.

I appreciate your time in reading this letter and welcome your reply.

Yours sincerely