

**NATIONAL SENIORS AUSTRALIA**  
**TASMANIAN BUDGET SUBMISSION**  
**2026-27**

December 2025

## Introduction

National Seniors Australia (NSA) is the leading consumer advocacy organisation for older Australians. Through our research and advocacy activities, NSA defends, protects and promotes the interests of older Australians, including self-funded retirees, pensioners, part-pensioners, veterans, and carers.

This submission sets out nine (9) key recommendations on issues of concern for Tasmanian seniors spanning areas of transport, concessions, health, housing and legacy.

At its heart, many of the recommendations address cost-of-living pressures facing older Tasmanians and are designed to enable older people to live a more dignified life, while also supporting the economy and budget.

These recommendations have been formulated by the Tasmanian Policy Advisory Group, reflecting feedback from NSA members in Tasmania.

## Key Recommendations

### Transport

1. Conduct a review of public transport services focusing on affordability and accessibility for older Tasmanians.
2. Introduce free or very low-cost public transport fares for seniors.

### Concessions

3. Ensure state-based concessions and rebates for essential services are maintained at appropriate levels for older Tasmanians.

### Health

4. Improve emergency department waiting times so Tasmania meets the national targets set for emergency departments.
5. Reduce public dental waiting times.
6. Work with the Commonwealth Government to address the stranded patient issues facing older people in hospital

### Housing

7. Ensure an ongoing commitment to the seniors' duty concession to promote downsizing among older Tasmanians and boost downsizing by increasing the threshold to \$750,000 for purchases of newly built homes.
8. Address the lack of low-cost housing for seniors in Tasmania by providing incentives for investment in low-cost housing for seniors

### Legacy

9. Provide older Tasmanians with opportunities to invest in the Battery of the Nation project to contribute to a sustainable future.

## Substantive Issues

### Transport

#### **1. Conduct a review of public transport services focusing on affordability and accessibility for older Tasmanians.**

Mobility is a key concern of older Tasmanians, especially those who no longer hold a driver's license. Good public transport systems allow older people to remain healthy and active as they age and access services and programs. The accessibility and affordability of public transport is essential to reducing social isolation and maintaining health and wellbeing<sup>1</sup>.

While public transport in built-up urban areas of Hobart and Launceston is generally well-serviced, there are less options available outside of these areas. Furthermore, while concessions do exist for public transport services in Tasmania, these are not necessarily consistent or adequate, and members have stated that concessions need to be introduced and/or increased for outlying and remote areas.

NSA believes a comprehensive review of public transport networks and systems should be undertaken, focusing on ensuring affordability and accessibility for older Tasmanians. The review should include public consultation across Tasmania and identify new and novel opportunities to provide better public transport in less populated areas, with access to an appropriate form of public transport regardless of locality.

#### **2. Introduce free or near free public transport for seniors**

Notwithstanding a broader review of Tasmanian public transport, Tasmanian seniors should be provided with public transport concessions commensurate with other jurisdictions to help address cost-of-living pressures facing older Tasmanians.

All states and territories provide public transport concessions to seniors, however, some jurisdictions have moved to offer free or very low-cost travel.

- The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) is currently trialling free public transport for people aged 70 and over during off-peak times.
- South Australia began offering free public transport for seniors (from 1 July 2022).
- Tasmania implemented a period of free bus travel for all commuters between 28 March and 31 April to alleviate the cost of high fuel prices.

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<sup>1</sup> Currie, G., Stanley, J. and Stanley, J. 2007. *No Way To Go: Transport and Social Disadvantage in Australian Communities*. Melbourne: Monash University.

- The Northern Territory introduced free travel on its bus network in Darwin, Palmerston and Alice Springs in June 2024, which has continued to be extended and has been linked to reductions in anti-social behaviour.
- Queensland introduced 50c fares in August 2024 and offers free travel in off-peak periods for seniors across the TransLink network. Note: The 50c fare contribution was included to enable ongoing tracking of patronage.

While there is no publicly available evidence of the impact of the ACT policy, a 40% increase in public transport patronage among seniors in South Australia has been reported since the policy has been implemented.<sup>2</sup> Importantly, the cost of implementing the policy in South Australia was budgeted at only \$1.26m per year.

In Tasmania, it has been reported the five-week trial of free bus travel between 28 March to 31 April 2022 was hugely popular and successful in increasing patronage. Not only did this initiative ease cost-of-living pressures, but bus patronage increased by 15% (in urban services alone), helping to reduce congestion and emissions.<sup>3</sup>

In Queensland, the introduction of 50c fares has seen a significant increase in patronage. South-East Queensland public transport patronage between August 5 and the end of October was up 5.1 per cent on the same period pre-COVID.<sup>4</sup>

Internationally there is evidence that free public transport results in increased patronage on public transport services (see Figure 1).

In calling for free public transport fares for seniors, it is important to note that the primary goals of the policy are to reduce cost-of-living pressures and improve the mobility of older people. This is especially important for people with mobility impairments, who might otherwise find it difficult to access essential services.

Encouraging more seniors to use public transport is good policy on these grounds because it will be easier for older people to get where they need to go. If the policy helps to ease congestion and reduce transport emissions at the same time, this will be an added benefit of the scheme.

NSA calls on the Tasmanian Government to follow the example of the ACT and South Australia and extend free public transport to seniors in Tasmania in the next budget or consider introducing 50c fares as has been done in Queensland.

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<sup>2</sup> Australian Bus and Coach 2022. "South Australian Seniors Enjoy Free Bus Transport" 1 Sept 2022 <https://www.busnews.com.au/industry-news/2209/south-australian-seniors-enjoy-free-bus-transport>

<sup>3</sup> Tasmanian Transport [Free public bus travel has ended – Transport Services](#)

<sup>4</sup> Minister for Transport and Main Roads 2024. <https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/101663>

For further details of this proposal please see Appendix 1.

Place implementing full free public transport	Impacts	Source
Tallinn, Estonia	Public transport use increased by 14% one year after fare change. There was a 5 percentage point decrease in car use. Average distance travelled by cars increased.	Cats et al (2017, p. 1101) and Grzelec and Jagiello (2020, pp. 5–6)
Hasselt, Belgium	Public transport use increased 10-fold (from a very low base). Most new users had previously travelled by foot or bike or public transport. 16% of new users were from car users (which was probably affected by complementary improvements in services). Free fares were removed in 2013 due to budget pressures. Car ownership was unaffected.	Cats et al (2017, p. 1089); (van Goeverden et al. 2006, pp. 10–11); Grzelec and Jagiello (2020, p. 6); and Fearnley (2013, p. 80)
Dunkirk, France	Bus trips increased by 85% in 2 years (65% during the week and 120% on weekends). Half of new users had moved from cars to bus, and the modal shift from car to bus was 24% (a large effect), but no data on peak hour congestion effects. Impacts were probably increased due to complementary improvements in services.	Figg (2021)
Taichung, Taiwan	The comprehensive shift to free fares from July 2011 led to a about a 20-fold increase in ridership on the 8 km free bus, but service provision was also enhanced so the effects will be conflated. The modal share of cars for transport fell by 0.6 percentage points — though the causal link was not established.	Yeh and Lee (2019, pp. 10, 12)
Templin, Germany	Public transport use increased by more than 10-fold in 3 years. 80% to 90% of new use was from non-car use, mainly walking/cycling. Of the induced demand, 10-20% was from car users. (This is not a 10-20% reduction in total car use.). Templin is also a small town of 14 000 at the time of the scheme's inception — so the results may not generalise well	Cats et al (2017, p. 1090); Storchmann (2003)
Stavanger, Norway	Large increase in public transport use, but substitution was mainly from foot/bike not from cars. 11% took buses only for fun. There was no evidence of reduced car usage (and therefore congestion reductions).	Cats et al. (2017, p. 1087); Fearnley (2013)
Leiden, Netherlands	Bus use on the free routes increased threefold. Of additional users, 45% were from car users. No measurable impact on congestion.	(van Goeverden et al. 2006, pp. 8–9)
Frýdek-Místek (Czechia)	Public transport increased by 81% from 2010 to 2017, but some of this growth would have occurred anyway. 8% of car drivers (in a survey) said they shifted to at least partly to public transport use. But the study found no decrease in traffic flows or congestion. Only some residents were eligible for the free transport passes	Straub (2020, pp. 7–8)

**Figure 1: Impacts of Free Fares on Public Transport and Car Use (Source: Productivity Commission<sup>5</sup>)**

<sup>5</sup> Productivity Commission 2021. Public Transport Pricing: Research Paper  
<https://www.pc.gov.au/research/completed/public-transport/public-transport.pdf>

## Concessions

### **3. Ensure state-based concessions are maintained at appropriate levels and consider increasing concessions for people with low incomes / savings.**

NSA acknowledges the Tasmanian Government's continued support for concessions. Given the rapidly rising cost-of-living, we urge the State Government to be responsive to these challenges and:

- continue to provide existing concessions, and
- provide additional concessions to those with lower incomes / savings

Older Tasmanians welcomed the federal government's series of energy rebates from 2023 as well as the Tasmanian Government's ongoing Renewable Energy Dividend (RED) as pragmatic actions to reduce energy bills.

The increasing cost of essential public services in Tasmania, such as water and sewerage, is still a major concern of older people. These increases are not being adequately matched by increases in income from pensions and other sources.

There is a need to increase the concession rate for low-income / wealth pensioners to relieve the financial stress these people face. However, there is no way to target additional concessions to those most in need or to deliver additional concessions to pensioners who spend down their savings in later life.

NSA has been advocating to the Commonwealth Government to introduce a targeted Pensioner Concession Card+ (PCC+) for pensioners with limited income / savings who are most at risk of failing to meet everyday living costs<sup>6</sup>.

All pensioners, regardless of their means, are eligible for the same concessions via the Pensioner Concession Card (PCC). For example, a homeowning couple can currently have up to \$1,074,000 in assets (not including the principal place of residence) and receive the same concessions associated with a PCC as a couple with no home or assets.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://nationalseniors.com.au/advocacy/fairer-concessions/pensioners-concessions-card>

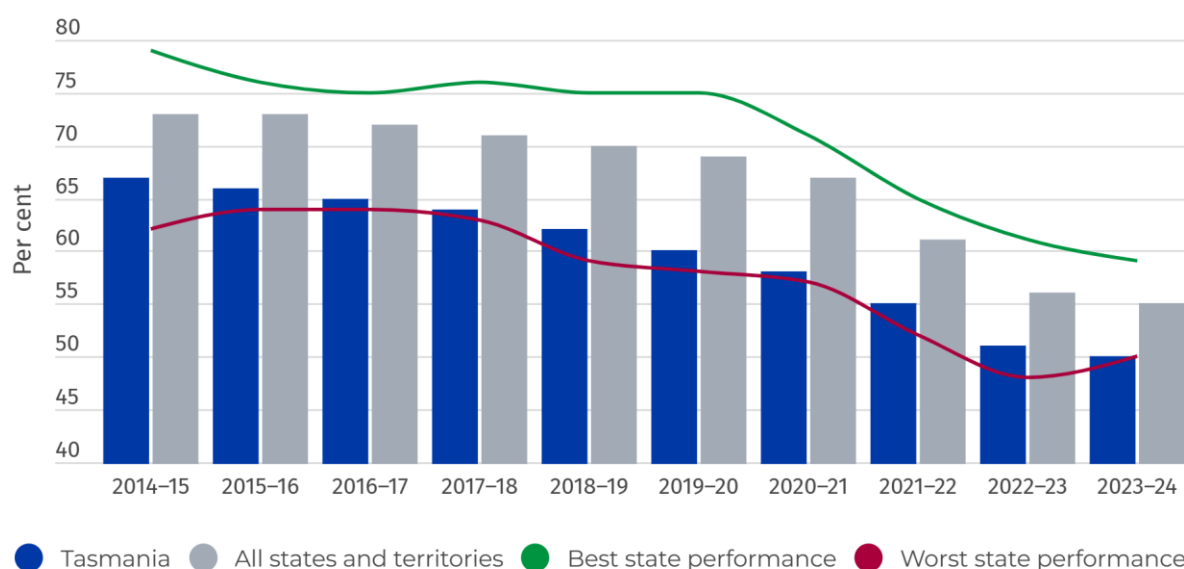
A PCC+ would offer all the concessions available to the holder of the existing Pensioner Concession Card but could be used to provide higher concession rates or additional concessions to those who need it.

We urge the Tasmanian Government to work with other state and territory governments to encourage the Commonwealth Government to adopt this innovation, so concessions can be delivered in a more targeted manner.

## Health

### 4. Improve emergency department waiting times so Tasmania meets the national targets set for emergency departments.

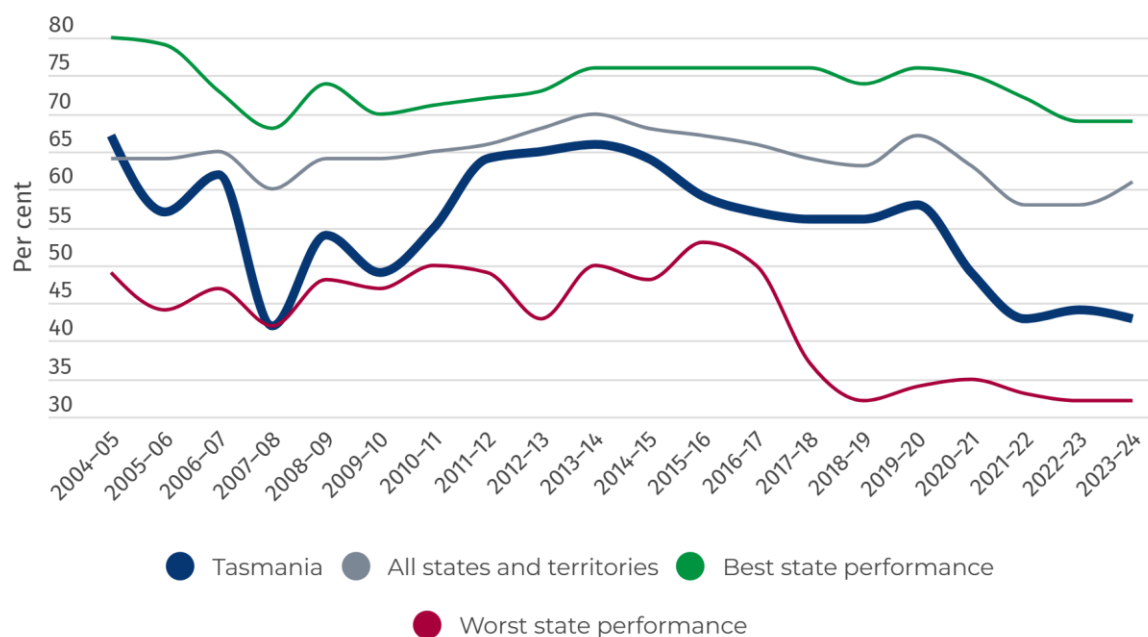
According to the AMA Hospital Report Card, the percentage of ED visits completed in four hours or less has continued to decline, reaching 50% in 2023-24 - the lowest since 2014-15 and equal to the worst performing state.



**Figure 2: Percentage of ED visits completed in four hours or less — Tasmania, Source [AMA 2025](#)**

Furthermore, emergency department presentations completed within the recommended time of under 30 minutes haven't improved since 2021-22 and are well below the state and territory average (see Figure 3 below).





**Figure 3: Percentage of Triage Category 3 emergency department patients seen within recommended time (<30mins) 2004-05 – 2023-24, Source: [AMA 2025](#)**

Improving hospital wait times can likely only occur with funding improvements, so we hope to see further announcements in the upcoming budget.

## 5. Reduce public dental waiting times

Oral health is central to the wellbeing of older Tasmanians, who generally experience a decline in oral health as they age due to a range of reasons, including loss of manual dexterity or memory issues related to dementia. Oral health impacts overall health and quality of life. A healthy mouth is important for eating and communicating and to ward off infections. Evidence suggests poor oral health is implicated as a contributor to other diseases and conditions such as endocarditis and cardiovascular disease<sup>7</sup>.

For older Tasmanians, the waiting time for an offer of public dental care was the worst of any state and territory in 2023-24 at 1,259 days (at 50<sup>th</sup> percentile). In comparison, Western Australia had the shortest wait time of only 159 days.<sup>8</sup>

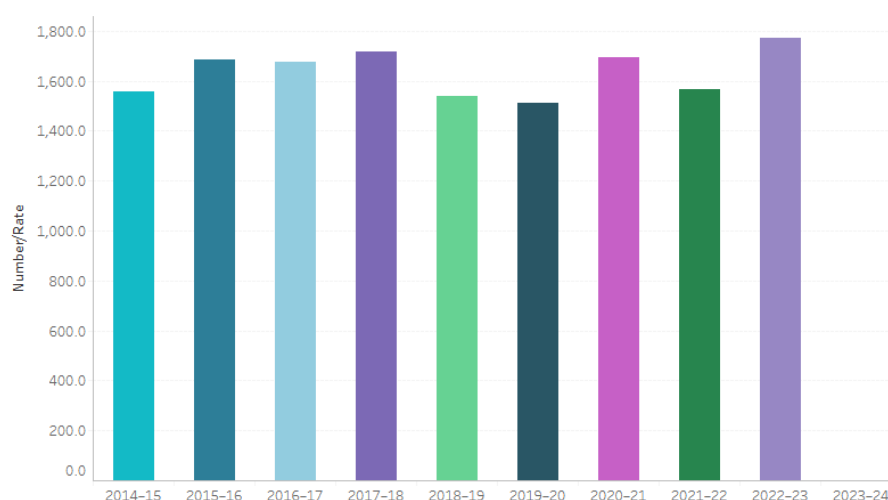
Waiting times for treatment in the public system works against oral health for seniors. Long wait times often mean existing problems worsen. What may have been a simple and

<sup>7</sup> Mayo Clinic 2018. 'Oral health: A window to your overall health' Accessed online 1 December 2018 <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/dental/art-20047475>

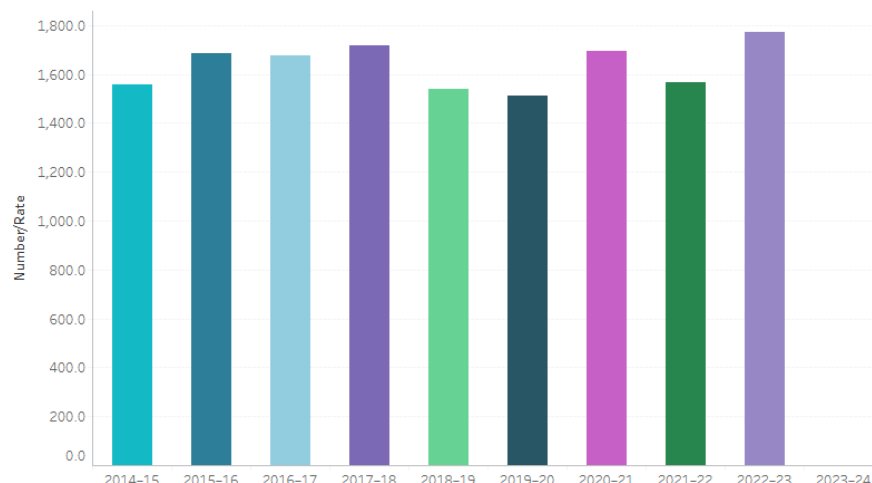
<sup>8</sup> Productivity Commission 2025. Report on Government Services <https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2025/health/primary-and-community-health/>

relatively affordable fix if treated in a timely fashion could turn into a more serious and costly fix. People who are not able to access public dental services are at risk of entering the hospital system to deal with acute health issues resulting from a lack of timely treatment, placing greater strain on the hospital system and health budget.

While potentially preventable hospitalisations due to dental conditions in Tasmania are below the Australian average in 2022-23, the number (1,770) and rate (3.1 per 1,000 people) of potentially preventable hospitalisations increased from 2021-22 (see figure 4 and 5 below).



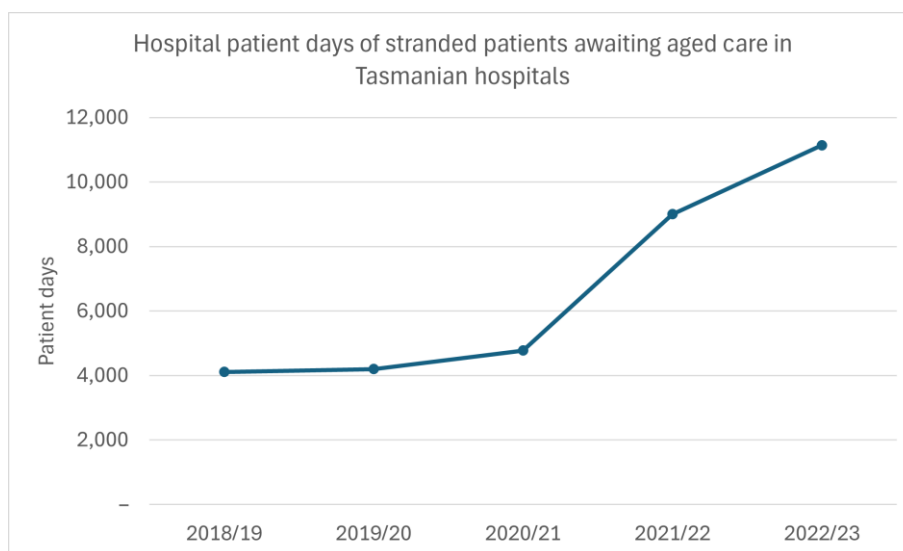
**Figure 4: Rate (per 1,000 people) of potentially preventable hospitalisations due to dental conditions, Tasmania 2014-15 to 2022-23** Source [AIHW](#)



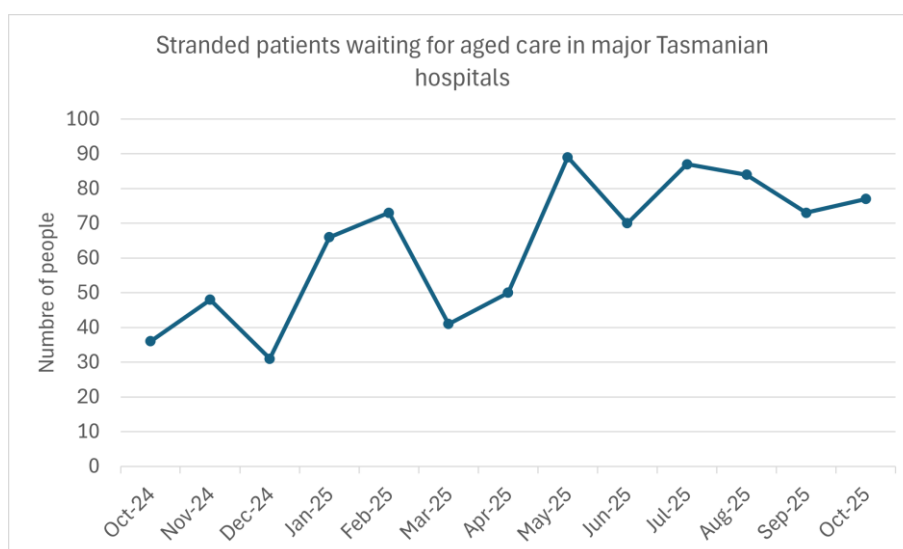
**Figure 5: Number of potentially preventable hospitalisations due to dental conditions, Tasmania 2014-15 to 2022-23** Source [AIHW](#)

## 6. Work with the Commonwealth Government to address the stranded patient issues facing older people in hospital

The stranded patient crisis has emerged quite recently. Data suggests that the number of hospital patient days used by people awaiting aged care has risen sharply since 2021.



**Figure 6: Hospital patient days used by those eligible and waiting for residential aged care in Tasmania.** Data source [Productivity Commission](#)



**Figure 7: Number of patients in major Tasmanian hospitals medically ready for discharge but waiting for residential aged care placement.** Data source [Tasmanian Government Department of Health](#)

It appears that the main cohorts of older people stranded in hospital wards reside in regional communities where there is a lack of residential aged care beds or have some form

of medical condition, such as dementia, which requires high intensity specialist aged care services.

Stranded patients need to be cared for in the appropriate setting. The issue will require significant funding to address the lack of services. NSA hopes that reforms to the aged care funding model will free up more resources to dedicate to this problem.

What is interesting to note is that the only state or territory, which does not have a significant issue with stranded patients, is Victoria. Victoria has historically funded public aged care services, particularly in regional areas and for people with high needs, such as dementia and are reaping the rewards with much lower stranded patient numbers.

The stranded patient issue represents a small but powerful illustration of the dysfunction of the state-federal health funding model. However, it is critical that the root causes of the problem are clearly understood and articulated. There are many factors that have caused this problem. Quality data is essential to identifying solutions to the stranded patient issue.

The Tasmanian Government should play a constructive role in this process to ensure that the right solutions are delivered as quickly as possible as this will help to reduce financial burden on the health system and wider budget.

## Housing

### **7. Ensure an ongoing commitment to the seniors duty concession to promote downsizing among older Tasmanians and boost downsizing by increasing the threshold to \$750,000 for purchases of newly built homes.**

NSA continues to thank the Tasmanian Government for implementing our recommendation to introduce a 50% reduction to stamp duty for eligible seniors who downsize their homes, bringing Tasmania in line with several other states and territories.

We ask that this commendable initiative continue, and the outcomes of the policy be made public and reviewed to ensure it is working effectively. This is to ensure that eligibility thresholds are set correctly given the rising cost of housing in Tasmania.

The Tasmanian Government should increase the threshold for the concession to \$750,000 where the purchase is for a dwelling, where construction was completed up to one year prior to purchase (in alignment with the first home buyer concession threshold).

This change will support the construction of new housing stock in Tasmania by incentivising the construction of homes that are suitable to older people.

## **8. Address the lack of low-cost housing for seniors in Tasmania by providing incentives for investment in low-cost housing for seniors**

Homelessness is a serious problem in Tasmania that affects people across all ages. People aged 55 years and older represent about 17% of all people experiencing homelessness in Tasmania.<sup>9</sup> What is a concerning trend is that homelessness for this age group has increased rapidly in recent times, placing greater demand on community housing.

Demand for housing for seniors will increase as the population ages and living costs rise. The Tasmanian Government must act now to address this issue before it becomes more pronounced.

NSA recommends the state Government look closely at this issue, identifying ways to mobilise investors to build affordable seniors housing to complement the existing stock of community housing in Tasmania. Offering tax incentives or guarantees to investors willing to contribute to the building of housing stock aimed at older people could help to reduce pressure on community housing which is needed for vulnerable people experiencing homelessness.

Currently there is a lack of low-cost housing for older people, retirement villages are increasingly becoming a higher-cost option unsuitable to those with limited savings / capital. As noted in a recent report from the Australian housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI)<sup>10</sup>:

*“The major providers active in the retirement village industry are for-profit companies who market their product as a ‘lifestyle choice’ to entice wealthy Australians to purchase accommodation. There is little prospect that small not-for-profit organisations will expand their retirement provision without significant government funding (in the form of tax breaks, subsidies etc.).”*

The Tasmanian Government should play a role in incentivising investment in low-cost housing for older people as a priority, including by incentivising older individual investors to stimulate construction of seniors housing. This could help to stimulate the housing market, leading to greater economic activity in Tasmania, creating benefits for the state budget.

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<sup>9</sup> ShelterTAS 2025. *Facts about Homelessness in lutruwita / Tasmania, 2025* [https://sheltertass.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/ST-FACT-SHEET\\_Homelessness-in-Tas\\_update-2025.pdf](https://sheltertass.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/ST-FACT-SHEET_Homelessness-in-Tas_update-2025.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> AHURI 2022 *How well is the retirement village model working for older Australians?* <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/sites/default/files/documents/2022-12/PES-392-How-well-is-the-retirement-village-model-working-for-older-Australians.pdf>

As noted below in Recommendation 9, there is an opportunity to mobilise older investors looking for “safe” investment options outside of superannuation. Providing investors with a safe investment vehicle could help to ease supply issues contributing to homelessness.

## Legacy

### **9. Provide older Tasmanians with opportunities to invest in the Battery of the Nation project to contribute to a sustainable future**

The wealth of older people provides significant opportunities for Tasmania. However, some seniors are concerned that investment options are ill-suited and impractical to their needs.

As the debate over deeming rates has shown, many continue to use investment options to protect their financial future, choosing to invest in safe products, such as term deposits because of fear about the economy<sup>11</sup>.

The average 80-year-old may have little or no superannuation, does not want to play the stock market or may not be able to invest in housing. As such they often seek security in bank deposits as a simple means of protecting their savings. While returns on savings are low, they invest this way because their savings are backed by a government guarantee, and it is simple to do.

At the same time, many older Australians are looking for ways to make a continuing contribution to future generations. Results from a National Seniors survey show three out of four older Australians believe climate change is occurring<sup>12</sup>. Many want to make a positive contribution to ensure the environment is protected for their children and grandchildren.

National Seniors recommends the Tasmanian Government consider providing opportunities for seniors to contribute through projects, such as Battery of the Nation. Investment in the development of this project is a safe investment and will also allow seniors to contribute to lower energy prices and, most importantly, the protection of the environment for future generations. Additionally, it will provide opportunities for mainland seniors to invest in Tasmania and supplement the existing \$30m invested by the State Government and the \$56 million commitment by the Federal Government.

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<sup>11</sup>National Seniors and Challenger. (2018). Once bitten twice shy: GFC concerns linger for Australian seniors. Brisbane: National Seniors <https://nationalseniors.com.au/research/finances/once-bitten-twice-shy-gfc-concerns-linger-for-australian-seniors>

<sup>12</sup> National Seniors Australia (unpublished). *National Seniors Social Survey 2019*

## **Appendix 1: Proposal for free non-peak public transport travel for seniors in Tasmania**

### **Introduction - Tasmanian seniors pay high fares for non-peak travel**

In Tasmania, particularly urban areas such as Hobart, seniors are charged relatively high public transport fares compared to full adult fares. The discount for seniors is especially poor compared to those offered by all other jurisdictions. Relatively high fares are charged throughout the entire day including during non-peak periods, although there is a day ticket discount in urban areas. Such high fares greatly discourage seniors from travelling on public transport; instead using their cars. For seniors who don't have reliable access to, or who are unable to access private transport, such high bus fares equate to a very real financial burden.

### **Nearly all other jurisdictions offer free travel for seniors in non-peak periods**

These high fares are in stark contrast to most jurisdictions which offer free travel for seniors during non-peak periods including weekends, as seen in the table below. The discount in Tasmanian urban areas of 31% to 35% is particularly poor for shorter distances. The discount is the poorest in Australia as most jurisdictions offer free travel during non-peak periods. While Melbourne does not offer free travel during weekday off-peak times, it provides a 50% discount. All jurisdictions offer free weekend travel for seniors or in NSW offer a substantial discount.

### **Allowing seniors free non-peak travel will better use non-peak services in Tasmania**

While discounts are offered for senior travel, fares during non-peak periods are still high and discourage the use of buses. In regional areas there is no additional discount for off-peak travel. Most bus services have many empty seats during non-peak periods which could be justifiably filled by seniors at no additional operating cost to government. The argument is that seniors are flexible in their travel patterns and given the correct price signals, would travel at non-peak times on public transport.

### **Tasmanian seniors' fares have risen at more than twice the inflation rate**

There has been an extraordinary increase in bus fares between 2012 and 2020, including fares for seniors, which have increased 33% compared with inflation in Hobart, which has been 14%. The cost of motoring remains stable while bus fares have risen above inflation. This is in stark contrast to other jurisdictions which offer free travel outside peak periods.

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1 The cost of purchasing a motor vehicle has fallen 2.8% since 2012 while the cost of fuel has risen by just 2.1%

**Table 1: Public Transport discounts for seniors around Australia**

<i>Area</i>	<i>Weekdays peak periods &amp; single trip discount</i>	<i>Weekdays between peaks discount</i>	<i>Weekends discount</i>	<i>Free travel in extended CBD for all passengers</i>
Tasmania Urban travel one zone travelled (shorter distances)	<b>31% discount only</b>	<b>35% discount for two or more trips after 9am</b>	<b>31%/35% discount Weekend fares same as weekdays</b>	NO free travel , Normal fares for very short distances
Tasmania Urban travel two zones travelled	50%	35% discount for two or more trips after 9am	50%/35% Weekend fares same as weekdays	No free travel
Tasmania outside Metropolitan areas	50%	50%	50%	<b>na</b>
Adelaide	50%	Free travel includes travel after 7pm	Free travel	Free travel in CBD area
Melbourne	50%. Free travel before 7am.	50%	Free Travel	Free on trams in CBD area
Canberra	50%	Free travel	Free travel	Normal fares
Sydney	Massive discount 84% for day ticket 44% to 77% depending on distance travelled	Massive discount 84% for day ticket 44% to 77% depending on distance travelled	84% Saturdays or 11% on Sundays <i>There is an all fare 83% discount on Sundays v weekday fares</i>	Normal fares
Perth	57% on average	Free travel includes travel after 7pm	Free travel	Free on trains and buses in extended CBD area
Brisbane	50%	Free Travel includes travel after 7pm	Free Travel	Free on loop services and hoppers
Darwin	Free Travel	Free Travel	Free Travel	Free travel

### **Short distance travel is expensive in urban areas, there are no free fare zones**

Unlike many other Australian cities, there is no free travel zone in Hobart. In fact, standard fares are charged for very short trips (as short as one bus stop), which discourages use of public transport over short distances. This is particularly unfair for seniors as their trips are often short and they pay a flat fare irrespective of distance travelled in urban areas.

### **Inconsistencies in seniors' fares persist despite recent improvements**

While there have been positive steps to offer a universal 50% discount outside urban areas, there are inconsistencies. Through a Greencard or Transport Me card a further 20% discount is available compared to higher cash fares, but this discount is inconsistent. For example, for Intercity services Devonport to Hobart there is no discount. To Sorell a discount is available only if tickets are purchased in bulk and for Devonport the 20% discount is eroded by an administration charge which applies to fares purchased via the Transport Me app. All seniors must be treated equally irrespective of how or where they travel.



**Many problems solved by one single solution, free non-peak travel for seniors**

To solve these multiple problems a remarkable and timely opportunity exists to make better use of this vital government resource. **This policy strongly recommends the over-due implementation of free travel on public transport in Tasmania for seniors travelling outside peak periods.** To clarify, seniors will travel for free when boarding a Tasmanian weekday bus service between 9am and 3pm or after 6pm as well at any time during weekends or public holidays.

Free travel for seniors in non-peak periods would apply to all non-peak Tasmanian services. For services travelling from urban areas to non-urban areas which have low frequency bus timetables, fares for seniors travelling in the counter peak direction (against the peak) should also be free<sup>2</sup>. This aligns with practices adopted in Victoria.

**Estimated cost of the proposal**

National Seniors has worked on costing a proposal for Hobart metropolitan bus services between an estimated \$185,000 and \$200,000 p.a. for free non-peak travel for seniors in the Hobart urban area. This represents a fall in revenue of approximately \$395,000 p.a. offsetting revenue gain of \$210,000 p.a. The overall cost of the recommendation represents **just 0.3% of the total annual cost to provide state-wide metropolitan bus services** operated by Metro, which in 2018/19 was \$55.8 million.

Throughout 2020, the use of public transport dropped by approximately 15% with anecdotal evidence suggesting for seniors the fall in public transport use was even greater. This implies the fall in revenue associated with Hobart travel would be much lower than estimated above. It is anticipated the estimate for the Hobart urban area is indicative of the probable current cost for the whole of Tasmania.

**The social, economic and environmental benefits of free seniors travel during non-peak periods are many. Free non-peak fares would:**

1. Fix the inequity between Tasmania and other jurisdictions, providing a positive image for seniors travel within Tasmania.
2. Increase travel in periods when bus use is low, making better use of government funded services.

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<sup>2</sup> For example services departing Hobart (urban area) to say the Huon Valley (non-urban area) before 9am and returning after 3pm should be free for seniors as such services are well under-utilised and the discount will allow a variety of trips to be taken to areas having longer transit times. Urban areas are defined as areas outside the current urban zone 2 boundary

3. Encourage seniors to swap from cars public transport, providing both financial relief for those who don't have private transport but also helping to ease congestion and emissions (see point 8)
4. Safeguard seniors from bus fares increasing above inflation.
5. Remove distortions to travel behaviour introduced by illogical and unfair fare structures (e.g. short distance travel and uneven discounts applied by individual bus operators).
6. Remove the need to introduce free fare travel zones as common in other jurisdictions.
7. Provide a boost for regional economies as budget-conscious seniors would be more likely to travel to such areas such as Huon, New Norfolk, George Town, Sheffield and Wynyard.
8. Provide significant environmental benefits through reduced vehicle emissions.
9. Reduce traffic congestion, leading to improved road safety and better use of scarce parking spaces (car free cities are better for tourism).
10. Improve operating costs and speed up bus services by reducing boarding times.

Revenue from lost fares would be minimal and there is potential revenue increase in peak periods as these services become more efficient and attractive.

## **Proposal 2: Additional low-cost bus services for seniors**

### **Introduction - Additional low-cost bus services for seniors**

The introduction of free fares for seniors in Tasmania during non-peak periods has many economic, social and environmental benefits at very low cost. Notwithstanding the need to undertake a broader review of public transport in Tasmania from a seniors' perspective, further analysis has identified several areas throughout Tasmania which have inadequate non-peak services. Inadequate non-peak services are a direct consequence of the emphasis on the provision of peak student bus services particularly in non-urban areas. To complement free fares for seniors, additional services need to be introduced in non-peak periods for selected areas.

### **Mobility for seniors is not consistent around Tasmania**

Mobility is a key concern of older Tasmanians, especially those who no longer hold a driver's license. While public transport in most built-up urban areas of Hobart, Launceston and the North-West Coast is generally well-serviced, there are less options available outside of these areas. While some regional areas have some choice with at least one-peak and non-peak service offered, many areas that do not (as shown below in Table 2).

More specifically, current bus services limit seniors' ability to undertake meaningful day trips for personal business such as medical and other appointments and shopping as well as social and recreational activities.

### **Seniors need bus services at the right times**

For many years in Tasmania, bus services have focused on how best to accommodate students, largely at the expenses of providing services to other travellers, particularly seniors. The emphasis has been on enabling students to travel to and from educational facilities, but such services are not always convenient for seniors with no option but to travel at peak times with students occupy limited seating.

Seniors need some flexibility to travel, without overly long waiting times. The introduction of return non-peak services between peak periods (both am and pm) would encourage bus travel among seniors.

### **Provision of additional non-peak services at low cost**

There is ample opportunity to run additional services for seniors at low cost, as most seniors do and could travel outside peak times. Such low-cost additional services may be supplied outside peak periods given both bus and driver availability. Often, bus drivers are paid when they are not driving but still need to make-up hours to form a shift. In the industry this is termed "under time."

Times at which drivers are generally available at low cost are after the morning student peak and before the afternoon student peak. The cost of providing a service in such periods would be the operating cost of a bus only, represented by additional fuel and maintenance.

### **Opportunities for additional services including better Sunday/public holiday services**

There are several areas in Tasmania where additional weekday services could be provided immediately after or before weekday peak periods, at low cost (see Table 2 below). There are also a significant number of areas where timetabled services are infrequent or run incorrectly, particularly on Sundays and public holidays. The latter issue is problematic trapping seniors without alternative transport at home.

While providing or altering Sunday/public holidays could be relatively more expensive than improving weekday non-peak services due to a lower availability of bus drivers, the practical and social benefits of effective seven day a week travel are significant.

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3 Most services to urban fringe areas allow seniors choice with adequate variety of trips and some regional areas are serviced better than others with adequately serviced regional areas include Dover, St Helens and Scottsdale/Bridport.

This current analysis focuses on the provision of low-cost weekday non-peak services. Additional Sunday/Public Holiday services do not require an additional bus to service any new trips, but associated driver penalty rates are high increasing costs. Priority should be placed on providing new weekday no peak services.

### Identifications of areas where services need to be improved

Despite a significant improvement in some Tasmanian services, National Seniors believes the recent review of services did not fully consider the adequate and cost-effective provision of services to seniors. We urge government to conduct a review of deficiencies area-by-area with a focus on seniors living outside key urban areas. All services including some urban services should be improved where it is cost effective.

**Table 2: Proposed additional non-peak low-cost weekday services**

Route	Problem	Additional service
Smithton/Stanley to Burnie	Only one daily service, focused at students only	Extra return service departing Burnie to Smithton immediately after the AM student peak
Deloraine, Westbury, Carrick to Launceston	1st Morning service too early, 2nd service too late. General lack of service frequency	At a minimum an additional return service departing Deloraine after the AM student peak.
Ross/Campbell Town to Launceston	1st Morning service too early, 2nd service too late. General lack of service frequency	At a minimum an additional return service departing Ross after the AM student peak.
Oatlands/Kempton to Glenorchy	1st Morning service too early, 2nd service too late. General lack of service frequency	At a minimum an additional return service departing Oatlands after the AM student peak.
Swansea/Triabunna/Orford to Hobart	Return service to Swansea only operates on school days	Swansea service to run during school holidays.
Nubeena/Dunalley to Hobart	Only one daily service, focused at students	Extra return service departing Hobart to Nubeena immediately after the AM student peak
Primrose Sands to Rosny Park	No service available for seniors	Utilise additional service to Nubeena and operate a 2nd return services before the PM student peak.
Woodbridge to Kingston	Large gap between services in the middle of the day.	Additional return service to depart for Woodbridge around noon to 1pm.
Bruny Island to Kingston	No service available to seniors	Return service between student peaks
West Hobart to Hobart	Low/unusual frequency (every 40 minutes approx.) between student peaks. Erratic twisty route	Implement standard 30 minutes frequency service. Simplify route
South Hobart/Upper Strickland Avenue to Hobart	Low/unusual frequency to South Hobart (every 40 minutes approx.) between student peaks. No service between peaks to Upper Strickland Avenue	Implement standard 30 minutes frequency service to South Hobart. Extend where possible to Upper Strickland Avenue

**Estimated cost of the additional services**

The supply of the above additional services would vary route-by-route. Indicative costs for the additional return service from Deloraine to Launceston on weekdays suggest an estimated<sup>4</sup> \$32,000 p.a. to be offset by revenue. Given the overall expenditure of bus services in Tasmania in the order of \$100 million p.a., the above additional costs represent a very small fraction of the overall state budget for public transport. On the assumption that a bus and bus driver are available with an operating cost of a bus at \$1.25 per km in service

**Social, economic and environmental benefits for additional non-peak services to areas with deficient timetables**

1. More accessible timetables operating for a wider population of the community, beyond the current focus on accommodating student demand.
2. Complement the proposal to provide free seniors travel bus services in non-peak periods.
3. Increased senior patronage.
4. Better utilisation of scarce resources (including buses and drivers who often lie idle in non-peak periods - marginal cost of operating services during weekday non-peak periods is very low).
5. Equitable provision of bus services irrespective of the region or area lived in.
6. Boost regional economies as seniors would be able to better travel from areas with deficient bus services improving overall economic activity.
7. Significant environmental benefits from reduced emissions.
8. Reduced traffic congestion, leading to improved road safety and better utilisation of scarce parking spaces

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