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Hon Tim Pallas MP
Treasurer
1 Treasury Place
East Melbourne VIC 3002

Dear Treasurer

Victorian Government State Budget 2016-17

National Seniors is pleased to present you with our proposals for consideration as part of the 2016-17 State Budget.

National Seniors is a not-for-profit organisation that gives voice to issues that affect Australians aged 50 years and over. It is the largest membership organisation of its type in Australia.

This list of proposals has been developed by our Victorian Policy Advisory Group. The Policy Advisory Group is made up of National Seniors members who represent the views of our diverse membership across Victoria.

If you would like to discuss any of these proposals, please contact me via policy@nationalseniors.com.au

Yours faithfully

Arnold Bates
Policy Advisory Group Chair



Be
heard

National Seniors Victoria State Budget 2016 Proposals

Concessions and Utilities

- **Maintain current levels and eligibility criteria of concessions to holders of a Pensioner Concession Card, Commonwealth Seniors Health Card and Seniors Card.**
- **Provide gas concession increases in line with the percentage gas price increases for all fixed income Victorian residents.**
As we moved from locally priced gas supplies to export market pricing, the cost of household gas increased.
- **With the current competition in electricity supply price deals, we ask that you ensure retail offers are *Fixed Term* and transparent.**
- **Establish a Parliamentary Inquiry into reforming planning regulations to facilitate environmentally friendly building practices. The inquiry would examine the feasibility of installing distributed generation solutions into new and existing buildings (both public and private). Further to this we ask for changes to planning regulations to encourage installation of energy saving devices in all new residential housing.**
Victorian seniors support reducing the current dependence on coal generation and moving towards a greater mix of environmentally friendly energy solutions that can provide affordable electricity well into the future. Energy saving devices in households can provide substantial relief from rising electricity prices and is particularly relevant to seniors living in older, less energy efficient homes.

Housing

- **Reform rental housing agreements by introducing longevity to contracts.**
High density unit accommodation close to services and facilities is hard to find and essential to ageing in place. Under current regulation the average residential rental agreement nationally is under two years. Whilst we acknowledge that this is for a variety of reasons, long term rental agreements are desperately needed. We ask the Victorian Government to urgently address this problem and facilitate long term affordable housing for seniors, especially single retirees with low income and limited assets.
- **Apply an indexation rate to the threshold for the Stamp Duty Concession available to holders of Pensioner Concession Card, Health Care Card, Commonwealth Seniors Health Card and Department of Veterans' Affairs Gold Card.**
The current rate has not been increased since 2011.
- **Introduce planning regulations to ensure that all new Retirement Villages and Manufactured Home Parks are built to Age Friendly Universal Design Standards.**
Age-friendly land-use planning, design and development are necessary to achieve the desirable tenet of 'ageing in place' but requires mandated standards in the planning system to be effective.

Employment, Education and Training

- **Remove the restriction on workers' compensation for those over the age of 65.**
Victorian workers aged over 65 are unable to access compensation or insurance cover for a work related injury, which is a disincentive to workforce participation and also a barrier for employers hiring mature aged workers. We note that there are no age limits in the Western Australian and Queensland workers' compensation schemes.

- **Implement state wide incentives similar to the ‘Mature Age Workers Add Value’ intervention projects in the Department of Health and Human Services.**
The State Government should take a leadership role in encouraging mature age employment across the public sector. We also suggest establishing measurable targets for employing mature age workers in all departments.

Transport

- **Ensure all development of high density trains and trams are tested by older people before implementation. We also recommend an increase in the number of priority seating on transit vehicles.**
The limited mobility and reduced strength of older patrons is often ignored (e.g. seat removal to increase standing capacity and door handle changes to avoid trapping clothing) in designing new vehicles.
- **Provide more public transport routes in regional areas, where it is found to be feasible and affordable.**
Inadequate public transport in outer urban and rural regions of Victoria has negatively impacted senior residents in these areas and heightened their risk of isolation. The lack of public transport in these regions means many older drivers are forced to hold onto their drivers licenses for daily travel. These motorists are then at risk of isolation when declining health restricts their ability to drive.
- **Maintain the current level of funding for Protective Services Officers (PSO) program.**
Senior travellers are greatly reassured of their safety and well-being since the PSO service was provided for Melbourne’s train stations at night. This excellent service must be maintained.
- **Implement infrastructure projects that will increase accessibility to transit centres to and from outer urban areas.**
Seniors want to use Metro trains but find access to their local station almost impossible unless they take a taxi to and from the station or get dropped off by a friend or relative both ways. Station car parks (where available) overflow by 7.30am and local bus services either do not connect with the station or suffer frequency drop off after morning rush hour. Better coordination between bus and rail services at major Metro stations in outer urban areas could alleviate these issues and make better use of existing network capacity.

Health

- **Improve the waiting times for emergency departments, by implementing achievable targets and appropriately allocating funding.**
Elderly members report having to wait up to six hours in pain and distress to be attended to in emergency departments.
- **Reduce wait lists for publicly funded non-life threatening surgery.**
Creating an efficient system to deal with wait lists and surgeries will have a positive impact on seniors reengaging in the community, particularly for residents in rural areas who are adversely affected by wait times.