



# National Seniors Australia

## ACT Election 2020

### Priorities for the over 50s



#### Health

##### **Cut emergency and elective surgery wait times; and address the rising cost of specialists' fees**

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Health is the number one concern for seniors in the ACT. Seniors continue to be frustrated by problems within the hospital and health care system, namely waiting times in the public system. The health care system is not meeting increasing needs and there is a clear need to boost funding for elective surgery and emergency to meet growing wait times.

Waiting times in emergency require urgent attention. Currently, the ACT is one of the poorest performing states or territories.

The cost of specialist services is also a major worry. ACT seniors are particularly concerned about excessive specialist fees in the capital and would welcome any moves to help address this important issue.



#### Housing

##### **Ensure more age-friendly housing in the ACT to allow older people to age-in-place**

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Current building regulations do not enforce adequate accessibility standards that can make it safer for people as they age. The market has focused too much on large high-rise apartments in the centre of the city, which are not desirable or affordable for most seniors.

Compounding this problem is a lack of affordable housing options in the ACT. Government must ensure more stringent inspection and certification regimes to enforce the new age-friendly building regulations. There is also a need for extra crisis accommodation for older people who are at risk of homelessness.

#### End of Life

##### **Improve support for end of life care for all people in the ACT**

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Older people in the ACT are highly concerned about the quality of care they will receive when they are near the end of their life. This causes many significant distress. While most people want to die in their own homes, the reality is that many will require care in a professional setting to minimise pain and discomfort. Dedicated hospice facilities must be built as a matter of urgency in the areas of Tuggeranong and Gungahlin to ensure that all people get the care they need.

All parties, regardless of whether they form government, should also pressure the federal government to give the ACT the powers to make its own laws on Voluntary Assisted Dying.



## Essential Services

### Reduce cost of living pressures for seniors

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There is a strong belief among seniors that the cost of essential services is increasing too rapidly, placing seniors under severe cost pressure. Living costs are particularly problematic for vulnerable seniors on low-fixed incomes. As the cost of essential services rise, it makes it difficult for older people to make ends meet.

One way to support seniors, is to increase the current utilities subsidy to help meet the rising cost of these essential services. Seniors would also like to see the eligibility criteria for subsidies reviewed to ensure that more seniors are eligible. Other states and territories, including Western Australia, offer Commonwealth Seniors Health Card holders access to concessions for essential services, such as electricity and rates.



## Age-Friendly Canberra

### Ensure that Canberra is an accessible city for people of all ages

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As the capital, Canberra should be leading the nation in providing a fully accessible city open to all. Maximising accessibility and mobility will ensure that both young and old can get out and enjoy the outdoors. This will increase social inclusion and improve physical and mental health, with flow on benefits from declining health costs.

Progress on the implementation of an age-friendly policy needs to be demonstrated through the allocation of resources for age-friendly upgrades to public infrastructure in the annual Budget. This should include a program to fix and upgrade footpaths across all suburbs; more open space in areas around high-rise buildings; and better access to bus networks.

Seniors would also like to see a cleaner Canberra program established to reinvigorate the city.



## Social Inclusion

### Provide opportunities for greater social inclusion among older people in the ACT

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The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the issue of social isolation. Older people need opportunities to be connected to their communities.

While the uptake of digital technologies has been vital in reducing social isolation during the pandemic, this should not be an opportunity to ignore traditional spaces for older people. Should a vaccine become available and life return to normal there is a need for community spaces for older people. For example, building a senior citizens club in Gungahlin would provide a short-term economic stimulus and a space for older people to meet and get together when the threat of COVID-19 has abated.

Increasing the level of support for older people experiencing mental health conditions will also be important to address social isolation among seniors.