

**NATIONAL SENIORS AUSTRALIA
TASMANIAN BUDGET SUBMISSION**

2022-23

December 2021

Introduction

National Seniors Australia is the leading consumer lobby group for older Australians and the fourth largest organisation of its type in the world.

This submission sets out key recommendations on issues of concern for Tasmanian seniors. National Seniors calls on the Tasmanian Government to:

- review the affordability and accessibility of public transport systems
- ensure concessions meet rising living costs
- reduce waiting times for people accessing health services
- address rising homelessness among seniors
- create a dedicated ministerial responsibility for senior's issues
- offer seniors targeted training and reskilling opportunities, and
- provide an opportunity for seniors to invest in the Battery of the Nation project to contribute to a sustainable future.

The recommendations were formulated by the Tasmanian Policy Advisory Group, reflecting feedback from National Seniors members in Tasmania.

National Seniors' Tasmanian Policy Advisory Group plays a key role in identifying important topics and emerging issues affecting the over-50s throughout Tasmania. It acts on behalf of National Seniors as a conduit between our Tasmanian members and the Tasmanian Government.

In addition to regular contributions to the Tasmanian Budget process, National Seniors engages in consultations and has provided feedback to government to inform legislative review processes.

Key Recommendations

Transport

1. Conduct a review of public transport services focusing on affordability and accessibility for older Tasmanians.
2. Provide free off-peak and weekend travel on public transport 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. Commit to meeting the national targets for dental waiting times.

Housing

6. Ensure an ongoing commitment to the *duty concession* to promote downsizing among older Tasmanians.
7. Address the growing issue of homelessness facing vulnerable seniors in Tasmania.

Ministerial responsibility for seniors' issues

8. Expand the role of a current Minister to include specific responsibility for seniors.

Employment and skilling

9. Fund the development of a dedicated reskilling program for the over-50s.
10. Remove age-based restrictions within Tasmania's Workers Compensation Scheme.

Legacy

11. 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 wellbeing¹.

While public transport in built-up urban areas of Hobart and Launceston are 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.

National Seniors 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. Provide free off-peak and weekend travel on public transport for seniors

Notwithstanding a broader review of Tasmanian public transport, Tasmanian seniors should be provided with public transport concessions that are commensurate with offers in other jurisdictions. There are ongoing moves within cities of mainland states to offer free public transport in off-peak hours to encourage greater public transport use.

Access to public transport is essential to social inclusion and wellbeing. A lack of accessible transport exacerbates social isolation and restricts access to health and social activities, essential for quality of life. Transport concessions and subsidies ensure those with limited means have mobility and social connectedness.

Both Gold Coast City and the Brisbane City Council have introduced free off-peak bus travel including free weekend travel for seniors. While still in its infancy in Brisbane, the Gold Coast extended this concession based on its ongoing success. Since free travel began on 1

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

September 2013, more than two million trips have been made on TransLink buses by Gold Coast seniors². Most users reported they were using public transport for the first time and/or were using public transport more.

Free off-peak travel for seniors is also available in Perth, Adelaide, Canberra and Darwin. Free travel is available on weekends in Melbourne which offers free travel by public transport over the network during weekends.

Free off-peak travel will result in considerable health benefits as people walk to bus services rather than sit in cars. It will also ease parking issues and provide environmental benefits from the reduction of car use in inner city areas. Based on these positive impacts, National Seniors recommend that seniors be able to travel on bus services for free during off-peak (9am to 3pm, and evenings after 6pm) and on weekends.

For further details of this proposal please see Appendix 1.

Concessions

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

National Seniors acknowledges the Tasmanian Government's continued support for concessions. We urge the State Government to:

- continue to provide existing concessions, and
- ensure that concessions increase in line with cost of living (CPI) increases.

The increasing cost of essential public services, such as water and sewerage, in Tasmania is a major concern of our members.

These increases are not matched by increases in income from pensions and other sources. There is a need to increase concessions for pensioners and other low-income seniors to match increasing expenses and relieve financial stress. One option is to apply indexation to concessions annually in line with any increase in the cost of the corresponding essential service. This creates a feed-back loop, which places an onus on government to contain cost increases for essential services. Any increase in essential services will result in an increase in cost to government. Conversely, any reduction in the costs of essential services will result in a reduction in the cost of concessions to government.

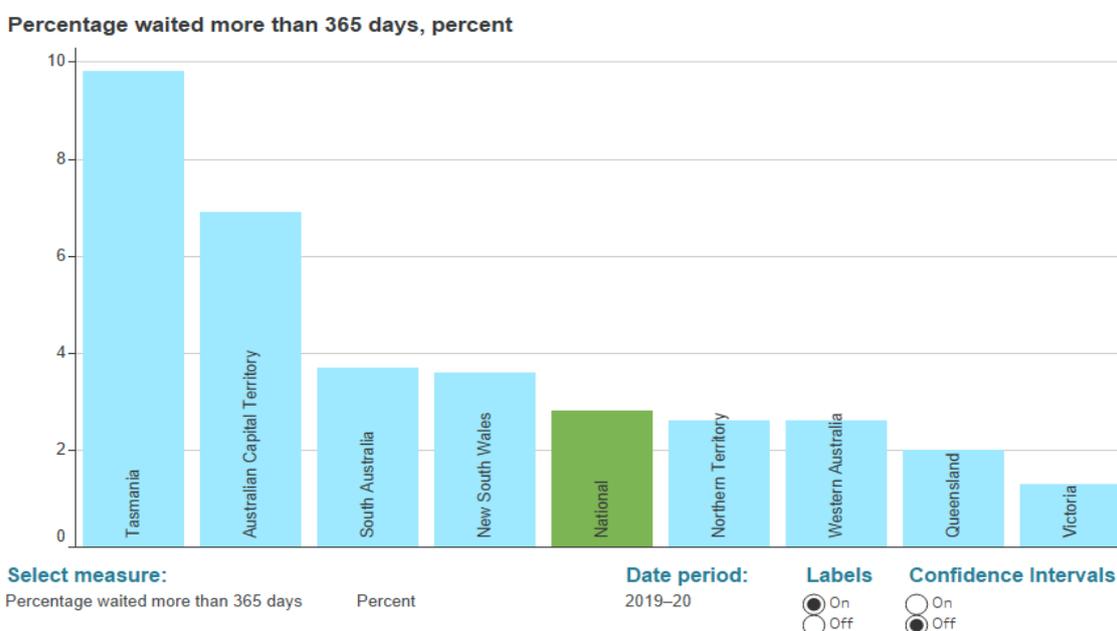
² City of Gold Coast 2016. 'Free seniors bus travel extended for four years'. Accessed online 20 November 2019 <http://news.cityofgoldcoast.com.au/media-releases/free-seniors-bus-travel-extended-four-years>

Health

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

Health is a major concern for National Seniors members in Tasmania. Prior to COVID-19, the Tasmanian hospital system was under increasing stress as it struggled to cope with an ageing population and increasing incidents of chronic disease. The impacts of these pressures are reflected in Figure 1 (below), which shows Tasmanian patients have the longest waiting list in the country for elective surgery and Figure 2 (over) which shows Tasmanian hospitals lag behind national benchmarks for waiting times in public emergency departments.

While National Seniors members welcomed the State Governments \$600m investment over four years into the health budget in February 2019, spending in health has sky-rocketed to cover increased costs of Tasmania’s response to COVID-19. Elective surgery lists have worsened with elective surgery almost non-existent for some weeks. Emergency Departments received some respite as patients stopped presenting but as restrictions lifted, the former problems of overcrowding of Tasmanian emergency departments have returned³.

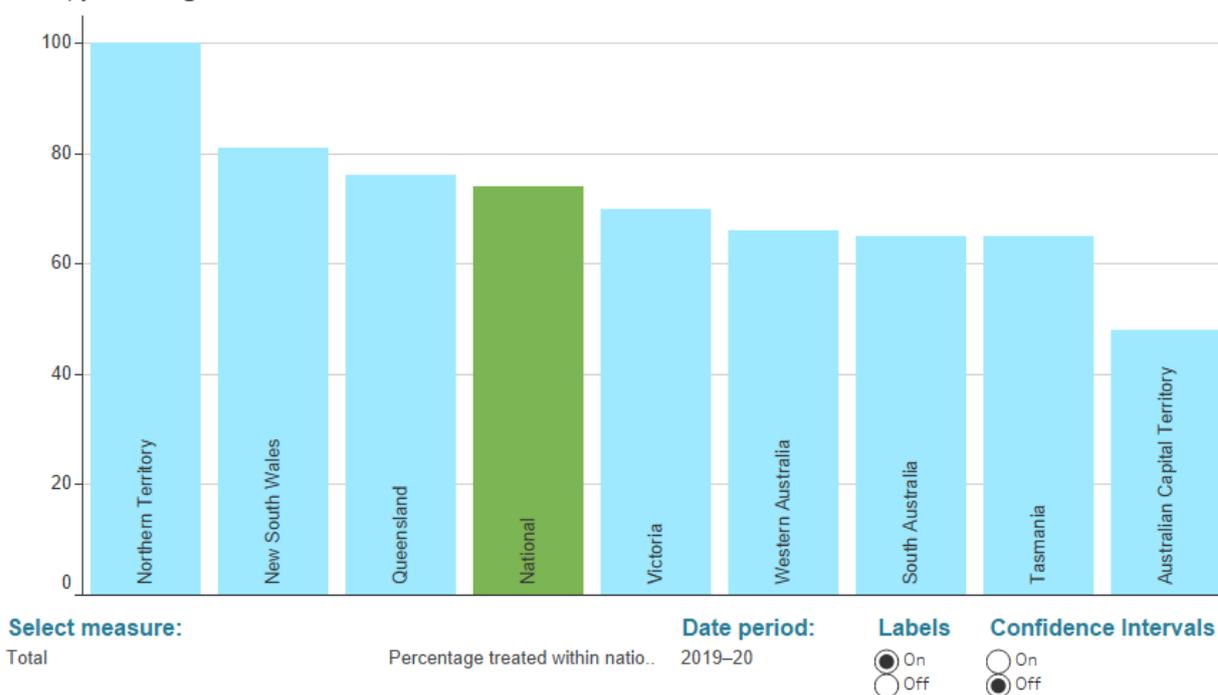


Source: AIHW analysis of the National Elective Surgery Waiting Times Data Collection

[Footnotes]

Figure 1: Proportion of patients who waited more than 365 days for admission to a public hospital for elective surgery (source AIHW: 2019-2020)

Total, percentage treated within national benchmarks



Source: AIHW analysis of the National Non-admitted Patient Emergency Department Care Database

[Footnotes]

Figure 2: Proportion of patients who are treated within national benchmarks for waiting times, for each triage category, in public hospital emergency departments (source AIHW: 2019-2020)

National Seniors members applaud the State Government’s \$12 million investment into the Launceston General Hospital Mental Health Precinct announced in this year’s budget and sincerely hope it helps to reduce mental health patient ED waiting times. In 2016-17, mental-health related presentations made up nearly four per cent of all ED presentations in public hospitals. The national median waiting time for mental health-related ED presentations was 19 minutes. Tasmania and Western Australia had the highest waiting time of 30 minutes⁴.

National Seniors members in Tasmania were distressed by reports of young people with mental health conditions found sleeping untreated on the floor of hospital waiting areas.

³Australian Medical Association (AMA) Public Hospital Report Card 2020 An AMA Analysis of Australia’s Public Health System [AMA Public Hospital Report Card 2020.pdf](#)

⁴Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) Health system: accessibility [Health system: Accessibility - Australia's health performance framework - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](#)

⁴AIHW 2018. *Mental health services in Australia*. Web report 11 Oct 2018. [www.aihw.gov.au/reports/mental-health-services/mental-health-services-in-australia/report-contents/hospital-emergency-services/patient-characteristics](#)

According to an ABC News report⁵, government figures show that in the financial year to March 2018, mental health patients at the Royal Hobart Hospital (RHH) waited up to six days in the ED before being admitted or discharged. The maximum ED wait time for mental health patients at the Launceston General Hospital (LGH) was almost four days, 1.57 days at the Mersey Community Hospital (MCH) and 1.3 days at the North-West Regional Hospital.

Earlier last year the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatry (RANZCP) reported that wait times for patients needing mental health treatment in Tasmania were the worst in 20 years⁶. The RANZCP also reported that ED staff were at risk of burnout caring for acutely unwell patients and working in chaotic acute wards.⁷ Media reports highlight the impact excessive wait times can have on people presenting with mental health issues.⁸

5. Commit to meeting the national targets for dental waiting times.

For older Tasmanians the average number of cavities per person is above the national average and is the worst in Australia. Tasmania also has the highest rate of total tooth loss - 10 per cent compared with the NT at 2.4 per cent⁹.

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 suggest that poor oral health is implicated as a contributor to other diseases and conditions such endocarditis and cardiovascular disease¹⁰.

Waiting times for treatment in the public system works against oral health for seniors. Waiting lists appear to have escalated and approximately 10,000 people are on current waiting lists.

⁵ Whitson, R. 2018. 'Patients spent up to six days waiting in Royal Hobart Hospital ED for psych bed, stats show'. ABC News Online. 10 July 2018. www.abc.net.au/news/2018-07-10/tas-news-stats-reveal-lengthy-wait-times-for-mental-health-beds/9959530

⁶ Whitson 2018. *Ibid.*

⁷ Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Physicians (RANZCP) 2017. *2017-18 Tasmanian Budget submission*. https://www.ranzcp.org/Files/Resources/Submissions/TAS-Branch-submission-to-inquiry_Aug2017.aspx

⁸ Hunt, L. 2017. ABC News Online 30 Jun 2017. 'Patient describes 'horrible' wait for mental health bed in Royal Hobart Hospital'. www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-30/hobart-mental-health-patients-ordeal-in-emergency-dept/8662894

⁹ AIHW 2018. *Oral health and dental care in Australia*. Web report 19 Nov 2018. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/dental-oral-health/oral-health-and-dental-care-in-australia/contents/healthy-teeth>

¹⁰ 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>

Housing

6. Ensure an ongoing commitment to the duty concession to promote downsizing among older Tasmanians

National Seniors thanks the Tasmanian Government for implementing our recommendation to introduce a 50 per cent reduction for eligible seniors who downsize their homes in our 2018-19 Budget Submission, bringing Tasmania in line with 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.

7. Address the growing issue of homelessness facing vulnerable seniors in Tasmania

National Seniors acknowledge the Tasmanian Government is working to address the issue of homelessness. This work can be progressed by:

- providing a substantial funding boost for low-income and homeless seniors to access suitable housing.
- considering the recommendations put forward by Shelter TAS, with an emphasis on addressing homelessness for 55 years-plus persons.¹¹

Homelessness is a serious problem in Tasmania that affects people across all ages but it is especially problematic for vulnerable older people. People aged 55 years and older represent 16 per cent¹² of all people experiencing homelessness. It is concerning that homelessness for this age group has increased approximately 33 per cent during the past 10 years. This comprises:

- 29 per cent increase in 55+
- 47 per cent increase in homelessness in the 65-74 age group.

Demand for homeless services 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.

¹¹ ShelterTAS2018. *Homelessness in Tasmania: the facts*. http://www.shelertas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/2017-08-03_ST_FACT-SHEET_Homelessness.pdf

¹² ShelterTAS2018. *Ibid.*

Ministerial responsibility for seniors' issues

8. Expand the role of a current Minister to include specific responsibility for seniors.

The appointment of a dedicated State Government Minister for Seniors and Ageing would bring Tasmania in line with other states and territories and provide the necessary support and services for the state's growing older population.

While the Tasmanian Premier has "responsibility" for older people and is supported by a parliamentary secretary, there is no formal recognition in the form of a ministerial portfolio for seniors.

The appointment of a Minister for Seniors and Ageing would better reflect the significant contribution older Tasmanians make to this state. This is especially important given a large proportion of the population are aged 50 or over. The current situation requires seniors to raise their concerns with multiple departments, which is both confusing and impractical.

Employment and skilling

9. Fund the development of a dedicated reskilling program for the over-50s.

Once a job seeker turns 55 their time spent out of the workforce increases dramatically. Job seekers aged 55 and older are languishing in unemployment for an average 73 weeks compared to 40 weeks for job seekers aged 15-55¹³.

A study by National Seniors found many mature age workers do not place great importance on learning, education and training¹⁴. Yet it is vital that mature-age workers acquire new skills and additional qualifications to ensure continued employment as the pensionable age increases and working lives become longer.

National Seniors believes it is essential to provide a dedicated reskilling program for people over 50 that targets people employed in industries and jobs that are in decline, and that is accessible to people in remote and outlying areas. This training should provide older workers with skills in growth areas of the economy so that they have skills which are suitable and highly sought after.

The Tasmanian Government's mature age employment program could include an initiative like programs provided through DOME (Don't Overlook Mature Expertise), a not-for-profit training and employment organisation which provided services to the unemployed over the

¹³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2014. *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed - Electronic Delivery December 2014*. cat. no. 6291.0.55.001

¹⁴ Williams, R. 2015. *Never too late to learn: learning, education and training among mature age Australians*. Melbourne: National Seniors Australia.

age of 40 to re-enter the workforce. The South Australian Government provided \$150,000 per year to fund DOME.

10. Remove age-based restrictions within Tasmania's Workers Compensation Scheme.

Over the last 20 years increased workforce participation amongst older aged groups has been integral to Australia's sustained economic growth. In recognition of this, successive governments have actively pursued higher mature aged workforce participation rates to increase productivity. Despite being encouraged to work past traditional retirement age, Tasmania's workers' compensation legislation includes age restrictions on claims, which may force someone to retire early when they want to continue to work¹⁵.

If a worker in Tasmania injures themselves before the age of 64, they are entitled only to income payments until the age of 65. If they are injured after 64, they will be able to claim income payments for only 12 months from the date of the injury. If there is no change to workers compensation legislation in the short-term there is a risk that a mature worker will be left with no access to income protection as the Age Pension eligibility changes to 67.

National Seniors recommends that Tasmania change workers compensation laws in-line with Western Australia and Queensland, which have no age threshold within their workers' compensation schemes but have capped limits on the period or amount of payment available regardless of age.

Legacy

11. 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 economy¹⁶. 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

¹⁵ WorkCover Tasmanian 2014. *A Guide to Workers Compensation in Tasmania*. Hobart: Tasmanian Government.

¹⁶ 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>

their savings. While returns on savings are minimal, 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 3 out of 4 older Australians believe that climate change is occurring¹⁷. 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 the Battery of the Nation project. 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

¹⁷ 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.

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 & 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)	31% discount only	35% discount for two or more trips after 9am	31%/35% discount Weekend fares same as weekdays	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%	na
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 free². 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.

Over 2020, the use of public transport has dropped by approximately 15% with anecdotal evidence suggesting for seniors the fall in public transport use has been 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.

² 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.

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. A full costing has not been undertaken but indicative costs for the additional return service from Deloraine to Launceston on weekdays suggest an estimated⁴ \$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

The social, economic and environmental arguments for additional non-peak services to areas with deficient timetables are many. It would:

1. Create 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. Increase patronage by seniors.
4. Provide 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. Create 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. Provide significant environmental benefits from reduced emissions.
8. Reduce traffic congestion, leading to improved road safety and better utilisation of scarce parking spaces

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