



**Australian Capital
Territory Budget
Submission 2015-2016**

2015

About National Seniors Australia

National Seniors Australia 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 with more than 200,000 members and is the fourth largest in the world.

We give our members a voice – we listen and represent our members' views to governments, business and the community on the issues of concern to the over 50s.

We keep our members informed – by providing news and information to our members through our Australia-wide branch network, comprehensive website, forums and meetings, bi-monthly lifestyle magazine and weekly e-newsletter.

We provide a world of opportunity – we offer members the chance to use their expertise, skills and life experience to make a difference by volunteering and making a difference to the lives of others.

We help our members save – we offer member rewards with discounts from thousands of businesses across Australia. We also offer exclusive travel discounts and more tours designed for the over 50s and provide our members with affordable, quality insurance to suit their needs.

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3 Key Priorities - ACT Budget 2015-16

Health

ACT seniors report that there is not an effective one stop shop which provides seniors with information on how to access health services including in home health services. National Seniors ACT members also report that much of the information which is currently provided on what Health services are available within the ACT is not clear and hard to understand.

- The ACT Government should provide a one stop shop to provide seniors with easy access to health services, including the development of easily read documentation regarding how seniors can access health services.

Concerns about the safety level of nurse to patient ratios in ACT residential aged care facilities in both public and the private sector have been raised by concerned National Seniors members.

It is hard to understand why the ACT Government have not prescribed nurse to patient ratios in age care facilities but have legislated staffing levels in childcare centers, kindergartens, schools and hospitals, including through the ACT Childcare Services Standards¹ which strictly regulates staff to child ratios.

- The ACT Government should prescribe safe nurse to patient ratios for all age care facilities with the ACT.

ACT seniors report a large demand on general practitioners resulting in long wait times to see a doctor. The ACT has the lowest national percentage at 49.7 per cent of general practitioner attendances which were bulk-billed within Medicare Local catchments.²

National Seniors is also concerned that 25 percent of general practitioners have signaled their intent to retire or leave the ACT within the next five years³ which could put added pressure on wait times to see a general practitioner.

- The ACT Government should work with the Commonwealth Government to increase the number of general practitioner providers in the ACT in order to ensure that the over 50's have timely access to general practitioners.

¹ ACT Childcare Services Standards (2009) Australian Capital Territory Government.

² National Health Performance Authority (2013) *Healthy Communities: Australians' experiences with access to health care in 2011-12* Commonwealth Government.

³ Rural Health Workforce Australia (2013) *ACT GP Workforce Scopes Study* Final Report ACT Government.

Transportation and Mobility

The inability to afford or access public transport exacerbates the experience of social isolation and inequality in accessing health care and education.⁴ The ACT Government is encouraged to consider following the lead of other states such as New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia which provide reduced or free public transport for seniors.⁵

- The ACT Government should allow seniors concession card holders to travel on public transport for \$2.50 a day with free travel on weekends.

In addition to affordability general access to transport is a crucial concern for ACT seniors. Seniors access to transport can be impacted by a number of factors.

The ACT Government should conduct a review in to the accessibility of transportation including the :

- Appropriateness of current public transport services including frequency and targeted services.
- The adequateness of the transportation options linking seniors with health services and hospitals.
- The number of disability car parks in both private commercial and governmental car park
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Energy and Equality

Many essential services including electricity and gas continue to increase above inflation rate. National Seniors accepts the restriction of the Government Energy concession to only those seniors who hold Pensioner Concession Cards, Centrelink Low Income Health Care card or Veterans' Affairs Card, however the high cost of energy is having a significant detrimental impact on all seniors.

- The ACT Government should work with the energy and gas retailers to provide discounts for all ACT Senior Card holders similar to the Victorian Age Friendly Partners Program which provides senior card holders with access to discounts on electricity and gas.⁶

Despite the encouragement by governments for workers to remain in the work force and work beyond traditional retirement age, ACT older workers are discouraged by workers compensation legislation that provides reduced or less comprehensive cover.

- The ACT Government should Amend the ACT Work Cover legislation to allow workers who are injured at or after the age of 63 to benefit from workers compensation in exactly the same way as younger workers.

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics(2013) 1381.0- Research Paper: A review of Regional Development Australia Committee Regional Plans.

⁵ Public transport Victoria (2013). Free weekend travel Victorian Government. Adelaide Metro(2013). Travel free with a Seniors Card Government of South Australia.

⁶ Senior Online Victoria (2015) *Discount Energy Plans for Seniors Card holders* Victoria Government.

Additional Priorities

4. Housing

Seniors describe a need for cheaper and more appropriate housing models in Canberra. One suggestion is to provide incentives for developers to provide alternatives to retirement villages for single seniors. Many tell us they would like to live in small developments of about six independent units linked to a common center to foster group identity and to combat isolation among them while maintaining independence in their own unit. The model used for retirement villages is suitable for some people but not for others. Many seniors want to downsize into a more appropriate type of housing to suit their active needs.

- The Government commission a study of more appropriate models for housing for seniors in the future.

5. Green Waste Bin

Seniors wish to see the provision of a green waste collection service within the ACT in line with the service provided by just about every council in metropolitan Australia. It was felt that those companies that currently provide "green trash away services" would be able to compensate for their loss of trade by contracting to the ACT Government to provide the service. Our members tell us that a number of seniors simply don't do the gardening as they have no cheap way of disposing of their green waste.

- The Government set up a process to start a Green Waste Bin program at least for seniors.