



National Seniors
Association

2008-09

Budget Submission to

the

New South Wales

Government

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1. Executive Summary

National Seniors welcomes this opportunity to highlight some of the pertinent issues identified by the New South Wales State Policy Group (NSW SPG) and the broader New South Wales membership and we look forward to a favourable outcome for our members in the 2008-09 State Budget.

National Seniors policies and policy agenda are developed through a comprehensive grassroots process that enables members to contribute through local Branches, regional Zone Committees, State and Territory Policy Groups (SPGs), and a National Policy Group (NPG). The outcomes from this policy formulation process are incorporated into our National Policy Document.

National Seniors NSW SPG was established in 2006 and plays a key role in facilitating the development and implementation of policies contained in National Seniors National Policy Document. The NSW SPG also acts as a conduit between – National Seniors members in New South Wales; the New South Wales Government; relevant community organisations; and the NPG on policy issues of relevance to seniors.

This submission focuses on recommendations to the New South Wales Government that fit into five (5) policy priority areas, namely:

Access to Health Services

- ***Take leadership through the Australian Health Ministers Conference, in calling for the widening of the target age range for the BreastScreen Australia program, so that women aged 70 and over receive reminders to claim their free mammogram every two years.***
- ***Work collaboratively with the Federal Government to implement all the recommendations contained in the National Oral Health Plan (2004-2013).***
- ***Increase funding for NSW dental health services in order to address long waiting lists, limited services, and cost pressures for age pensioners and low income self funded retirees.***
- ***Develop simple and practical oral health care planning principles as part of the overall nutritional care plan for every older person (in community or residential care), including programs to educate dentists about the specific needs of older patients, in particular those entering residential aged care facilities.***

Commonwealth/State Relations

- ***Urge the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to immediately establish a National Council comprising Commonwealth, state and territory Ministers responsible for Ageing, which would report directly to COAG and be responsible for developing strategic responses to the Intergenerational Report and other national ageing issues.***

Transport

- ***Proactively engage with the Commonwealth, state and territory governments to implement a single interstate scheme for Seniors Card holders across Australia.***
- ***Immediately remove the 15 per cent booking fee on rail vouchers for pensioners.***
- ***Undertake a state-wide older driver education campaign, which should include: wide media coverage; community workshops; and the distribution of brochures to GPs and community organisations and negotiate with GPs to bring forward a testing scheme that does not impose cost burdens on older drivers.***

Aged Care

- ***Provide leadership and work closely with the Commonwealth Government regarding new aged care bed allocations, and provide the overarching strategic planning function for the siting and design of aged care facilities in the state.***

Mature Age Employment

- ***In collaboration with the Commonwealth Government, community representatives and business, provide funding for the development of additional programs that provide information and assistance to mature age job seekers in NSW, and raise awareness of the necessities and benefits of including mature-age workers for employers.***
- ***Fund additional training opportunities for mature age job seekers to develop new skills and strengthen existing skills, to assist their return to the workforce.***
- ***Work with the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments to improve and standardise Workers Compensation legislation to ensure that employers and mature-aged workers are not disadvantaged by explicit and implicit age-based restrictions (i.e. cessation of entitlements upon reaching 65 years of age or pensionable age).***

We believe if these recommendations are adopted by Government it will go a long way to meeting the current and future needs of New South Wales Seniors.

2. About Us

National Seniors is the largest senior's organisation in Australia with over 255,000 individual members in 165 branches across the country. We are a not-for-profit community organisation with the following objectives:

- to provide economic and social benefits for people 50 years and over;
- to represent our members' views to Government at all levels; and
- to make donations and provide service and advice to charitable institutions assisting people 50 years and over.

National Seniors offers members a vast range of services and benefits and is an influential vehicle for contributing to policy debates affecting older Australians.

National Seniors' policies and policy agenda are developed through a comprehensive grassroots process that enables members to contribute through local branches, regional zone committees, State and Territory Policy Groups (SPGs), and a National Policy Group (NPG). The outcomes from this policy formulation process are incorporated into our *National Policy Document*¹.

The **National Policy Office (NPO)**, based in Canberra, facilitates the implementation of National Seniors' national policy agenda, and advocates on behalf of older Australians to government at all levels, and to business and the broader community. The NPO works closely with our National, State and Territory Policy Groups and our extensive network of State offices, branches and zone committees in determining issues of relevance to older Australians and identifying trends in ageing.

The work of the NPO is assisted by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, through the Community Sector Support Scheme (CSSS). The funding received under this scheme better positions National Seniors to:

- grow the operational capacity of the NPO;
- expand communications with the seniors' community;
- increase engagement opportunities for disadvantaged seniors; and
- act as a conduit for information flow between government and the community in order to draw together seniors' views on issues of relevance and provide a consultative mechanism for the government.

The NPO also plays a key role in informing the development of the research program for the National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre, which in turn, provides research input to the NPO.

The **National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre (NSPAC)**, established in 2002, is co-funded by National Seniors in collaboration with the Department of Health and Ageing. NSPAC's role is to research issues that impact on the ability of seniors to contribute productively to the economy and society. The centre is consumer focused in both the development of its research agenda and conduct of research activities.

¹ National Seniors. 2006. *National Policy Document*. Available at: www.nationalseniors.com.au/Policies.

3. National Seniors Submission

3.1 Access to health services

Through our research, access to health services, facilities and medicines have been identified as key priorities for seniors. It is essential that the New South Wales Government continues to offer support to older Australians to ensure equitable access to these services and increases financial support where it is inadequate.

The NSW SPG would like to highlight two health areas of concern, in particular – breast screening and oral health.

Breast Cancer Screening

In Australia, breast cancer is the most common invasive cancer diagnosed in females, with an estimated 13,000 women diagnosed each year.² Further, women aged 70 and over made up 26% of all breast cancer patients in 2003-04³.

The Cancer Council Australia has as one of its aims, “to achieve, after 5 years, a 70% participation rate in the national program by women in the target group (50-69 years) and access on request to the program for women aged 40 – 49 years *and 70 years or more* (emphasis added)⁴.” Further, the NSW Cancer Council Fact Sheet on Breast Cancer⁵ states that 1 in 11 women will develop breast cancer by the age of 75.

National Seniors strongly endorses the *BreastScreen Australia Program* and would like to take this opportunity to recognise the significant achievements the program has made through the active recruitment and screening of women for early detection of breast cancer. The program has no doubt contributed to the fall in the age-standardised rate of death due to breast cancer since 1990, and is now rightly recognised as one of the most comprehensive population-based screening programs in the world.⁶

However, whilst recognising these considerable achievements, National Seniors would also like to draw attention to certain areas of the program which require adjustment or additional investment, in particular, age eligibility requirements for regular reminders.

Currently, state and territory services are not required by national program policy to send out reminders to women not in the target age-range (50-69), and accordingly *BreastScreen NSW* sends out reminders every two years to women only in the specified age-range (50-69). An unknown proportion of time each month is then set aside for those who fall outside of this age range and who are therefore required to initiate the scheduling of a screening themselves.

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2006. *Breast Cancer in Australia – An Overview* .p.xv

³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2007. *BreastScreen Australia. Monitoring Report 2003-2004*. Available at: <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/can/bsamr03-04/bsamr03-04-c00.pdf>

⁴ National Cancer Prevention Policy 2004-06

⁵ The Cancer Council NSW, Available at: www.nswcc.org.au

⁶ Ibid. p.xvi

Up to 5 December 2004, women aged 70 and over could request breast screening on the same basis as for younger women. Since 6 December 2004, in practical terms, breast screening is generally only available to women aged 50 – 69.

There is considerable misinformation as to this availability. Newspaper articles and some health professionals advise that screening for the over 70s is available on request, which is in fact not the case. Rather, each month a small number of appointments are available for women over 70, but these are usually taken up quickly.

The costs at a suburban radiography centre, for women over 70 who wish to be screened for breast cancer are approximately \$106 for a mammogram, with no rebate available, and between \$120 - \$175 for an ultrasound. Whilst there is a rebate for ultrasounds, one is not performed unless there is an identified problem, such as a lump or a showing on a mammogram. These are therefore significant costs that are beyond the reach of many people who are on limited incomes.

The main risk factors in developing breast cancer are being female and age. While the incidence rate of breast cancer is highest for women in the current target age-range (50-69), the incidence rate for women aged 70 and over remains high at 26% of all diagnosed cases⁷ and this age group is being done a great disservice by *Breast Screen NSW* in being excluded from its reminder program.

In recognition of the high incidence rate amongst older women and in order to ensure that as many people as possible benefit from diagnosis and treatment, it is essential that age limits on reminders be removed.

It is recommended that the New South Wales Government:

- ***Take leadership through the Australian Health Ministers Conference, in calling for the widening of the target age range for the BreastScreen Australia program, so that women aged 70 and over receive reminders to claim their free mammogram every two years.***

Oral Health

Evidence shows that Australia's adult oral health is the second worst of all OECD countries – it is estimated that more than 650,000 people are on public waiting lists.⁸ Health authorities across the nation have identified the link between poor oral and dental disease and other chronic diseases. As a result, preventative health care is increasingly being encouraged across all health areas.

The *Commonwealth Dental Health Program* was introduced to reduce waiting times for public dental services by giving public patients subsidised access to private dentists. However, the Federal Government has since discontinued the annual funding for the program, arguing that the responsibility lies with the states and territories. While some states have increased funding for public dental programs, in general these dental programs have been inadequate and have failed to fill the gap created by the cessation of the Commonwealth program.

⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2007. *op cit*.

⁸ National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA) 2005. *Public Dental Services in Australia: Whose Responsibility?* Available at: <http://nrha.ruralhealth.org.au/cms/uploads/publications/public%20dental%20services%20in%20australia.pdf>

Given the increase in the ageing population, the move of many older dentists to part-time work, and the lack of university training places for new dentists, it is estimated that by 2010 there will be a shortage of more than 1500 dentists across Australia – or 3.8 million dental visits.⁹

National Seniors is concerned with the difficulties older people face in accessing oral health care and with the style of provision, in particular: the high cost of oral health care services; long waiting lists; and scarcity of resources, including funding, oral health care practitioners and equipment.

Older people living in residential aged care facilities also face difficulties in accessing oral health care services. Older people's oral health in many cases deteriorates when they enter residential care, with the management of oral health becoming increasingly difficult as people develop dementia and become more physically dependant on others for their personal care needs.

National Seniors members have expressed concern that in New South Wales, dental service provision has improved very little in recent years, and in some respects has even gone backwards. The New South Wales Government provides free oral health care for people holding a Pensioner Concession Card or a Seniors Health Card. However, waiting lists for receiving public oral health care can be years long. New South Wales has the lowest per capita spending on oral health care out of all of the states and territories, being less than half that in Queensland and the Northern Territory.¹⁰

In 2006, the New South Wales Government's Standing Committee on Social Issues prepared a report on dental services. In this report it was stated that NSW Health was developing an oral health plan for the state to run parallel with the *National Oral Health Plan 2004-2013*.

Whilst it is acknowledged that the Commonwealth, state and territory governments have prepared the *Plan*, which contains a broad range of recommendations aimed at ameliorating the current crisis, little has been done to implement it. This situation is further compounded by the constant 'buck-passing' between the Commonwealth Government and the states and territories over the responsibility for this crisis.

It is recommended that the New South Wales Government:

- ***Work collaboratively with the Federal Government to implement all the recommendations contained in the National Oral Health Plan (2004-2013) and subsequently, implement the NSW State plan.***
- ***Increase funding for NSW Health in order to address long waiting lists, limited services, and cost pressures for age pensioners and low income self funded retirees.***
- ***Develop simple and practical oral health care planning principles as part of the overall nutritional care plan for every older person (in community or residential care), including programs to educate dentists about the specific***

⁹ Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS). 2006. *Fair Dental Care for Low Income Earners – National Report on the State of Dental Care*. Available at: http://www.acoss.org.au/upload/publications/papers/1562_Fair%20dental%20care_%20final.pdf.

¹⁰ NSW Government Standing Committee on Social Issues *Dental Services*. 2006. Available at: [http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/PARLMENT/Committee.nsf/0/4fa2d0149b588095ca25714200077d20/\\$FILE/FINAL-%20COMPILED%2030%20MARCH.pdf](http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/PARLMENT/Committee.nsf/0/4fa2d0149b588095ca25714200077d20/$FILE/FINAL-%20COMPILED%2030%20MARCH.pdf)

needs of older patients, in particular those entering residential aged care facilities.

3.2 Commonwealth/State Relations

Given that the ageing portfolio straddles Commonwealth, state and local responsibilities, it is crucial that the various levels of government work collaboratively if ageing initiatives are to be planned, developed and implemented in an effective manner. Unfortunately, there is a current lack of cohesion across government, which is resulting in poor strategic direction, gaps in service delivery and poor information dissemination.

A national Ministerial Council that reports directly to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and has specific responsibility for the broad range of issues that affect older Australians (e.g. health and aged care, mature age employment, financial security, housing affordability and positive ageing) is required to overcome the current dysfunctional arrangements.

The complexities and overlaps inherent in aged care provision are one example of an area that would greatly benefit from a dedicated national Ministerial Council.

While some aged care services are funded by the Commonwealth, others are jointly funded by the Commonwealth and the states and territories. There are some (17) seventeen different funding arrangements for community care services including: Home and Community care (HACC); Veterans Home Care; Community Aged Care Packages (CACPs); Carer Respite Services and many more – all with varying eligibility requirements.

The lack of cohesion and direction across government in respect to aged care has no doubt contributed to the current situation: a complex web of services and funding sources, that is increasingly difficult for individuals and their families to navigate.

It is recommended that the New South Wales Government:

- ***Urge the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to immediately establish a National Council comprising Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers responsible for Ageing, which would report directly to COAG and be responsible for developing strategic responses to the Intergenerational Report and other national ageing issues.***

3.4 Transport

Seniors Card

Whilst noting that previous attempts by the Commonwealth Government to introduce a national reciprocal transport scheme have been unsuccessful, the current period of economic prosperity, growth in interstate travel and increased travel costs for seniors have ensured the issue remains pressing for older Australians.

Currently, the cost to a Queensland Seniors Card holder of a return trip from Sydney (central) to visit the Jenolan Caves (Blue Mountains) is \$23.20. This contrasts sharply with the \$2.50 fare for travel companions with a New South Wales Seniors

Card.¹¹ Similarly, a New South Wales senior visiting Queensland would have to pay \$22 for a daily ticket to the Gold Coast, as opposed to a Queensland senior who would pay only \$11¹².

Introducing a national transport concession scheme would go a long way to eliminating the anomalies and inequities created by the current situation. It would also remove a major disincentive for interstate Seniors Card holders to visit New South Wales, providing a welcome boost to the New South Wales tourism industry, and would encourage more New South Wales seniors to travel interstate.

National Seniors encourages the New South Wales Government to cooperate with the Commonwealth and other states and territories to implement a nationwide reciprocal travel agreement for seniors card holders.

It is recommended that the New South Wales Government:

- ***Proactively engage with the Commonwealth, state and territory Governments to implement a single interstate scheme for Seniors Card holders across Australia.***

Rail vouchers

Many New South Wales seniors rely upon public and community transport. Accessible, affordable and reliable transport is vital for continued community participation and healthy and productive ageing. The 15 per cent booking fee on so-called 'free' travel vouchers for pensioners introduced by the current New South Wales Government hurts some of the neediest people in the state.

It is recommended that the New South Wales Government:

- ***Immediately remove the 15 per cent booking fee on rail vouchers for pensioners.***

Older drivers

National Seniors has recently prepared a submission in response to the recent *Licensing of Older Driver* discussion paper put out by the Road Transport Authority (RTA)¹³. The final submission was based on: feedback from the NSW SPG; an issues paper posted on the National Seniors website and sent to interested parties; and comments that we received from the broader membership by way of emails, letters and phone calls.

National Seniors highlights a number of issues in its submission, including the need for increased older driver education; the ability of the New South Wales public transport system to cope with an ageing population; and the cost of compulsory medical tests for drivers once they reach age 75.

¹¹ City Rail NSW. Available at: <http://www.cityrail.nsw.gov.au/>

¹² Transinfo. QLD Government. Available at: www.transinfo.qld.gov.au

¹³ National Seniors. 2007. *Submission to RTA licensing of older driver discussion paper*. Available at: http://www.rta.nsw.gov.au/licensing/downloads/olderdriversubmissions/olderdriversubmissions_dl1.html

It is recommended that the New South Wales Government:

- ***Undertake a state-wide older driver education campaign, which should include: wide media coverage; community workshops; and the distribution of brochures to GPs and community organisations and negotiate with GPs to bring forward a testing scheme that does not impose cost burdens on older drivers.***

3.5 Aged Care

The present lack of cohesion between the Australian Government (which funds residential aged care facilities) and the state/territory and local governments (which facilitate their design and location) often results in poor siting, inappropriate design and operational delays.

Whilst the Commonwealth Government has prime responsibility for allocating and funding new high-care aged facilities, it is the role of the states and territories to ensure that these new facilities are developed in a timely manner and sited in appropriate locations, close to shops and support services

Unfortunately, local governments has been forced to provide the strategic planning function for the design and siting of new aged care facilities in New South Wales (which it is not resourced to do so), which often results in confusion, red tape and additional cost for aged care service providers

National Seniors believes that the New South Wales Government should provide leadership and work closely with the Commonwealth Government regarding new aged care bed allocations, and provide the overarching strategic planning function for the siting of aged care facilities in the state.

It is recommended that the New South Wales Government:

- ***Provide leadership and working closely with the Commonwealth Government regarding new aged care bed allocations, and provide the overarching strategic planning function for the siting and design of aged care facilities in the state.***

3.6 Mature Age Employment

The Australian Government's *Second Intergenerational Report* (2007) suggests that a major way of increasing Australia's overall productivity is by lifting workforce participation rates. The retention of mature age workers will also significantly contribute to alleviating the predicted skills shortages in many areas of employment.

While the participation rate of older Australians is now at its highest level on record¹⁴ there remains an estimated 120,000 mature-aged unemployed job seekers nationwide,¹⁵ indicating the need for further research and reform.

¹⁴ Commonwealth Department of Treasury. *Older men bounce back: the re-emergence of older male workers*. Available at: www.treasury.gov.au/documents/1190/HTML/docshell.asp?URL=04_men.asp

¹⁵ National Seniors. *Commonwealth Budget Submission 2007-08*. Available at: <http://www.nationalseniors.com.au/>

Further, research shows that organisations rarely implement programs specifically aimed at addressing the needs of mature-age workers, such as access to training. Individual concerns such as lack of confidence, familiarity with contemporary technology or practices and so on, also inhibit individuals from actively seeking work for fear of outright rejection.

Mature age employees have accumulated significant talents, skills and experience. It is important that New South Wales employers recognise and retain this valuable resource and provide opportunities for mature age workers to continue to work, or to return to work.

While recognising recent initiatives in New South Wales such as the NSW Ministerial Advisory Committee on Ageing's report, *Too Young To Go*¹⁶, greater commitment is clearly needed if New South Wales is to maximize the economic benefits of further increasing participation rates amongst its older citizens.

In particular, our members have expressed the need for greater assistance and information for mature age job seekers and awareness by prospective employers of the advantages of mature age employees.

It is recommended that the New South Wales Government:

- ***In collaboration with the Commonwealth Government, community representatives and business, provide funding for the development of additional programs that provide information and assistance to mature age job seekers in NSW, and that raise awareness of the necessities and benefits of including mature-age workers for employers.***
- ***Fund additional training opportunities for mature age job seekers to develop new skills and strengthen existing skills, to assist their return to the workforce.***
- ***Work with the Commonwealth, state and territory governments to improve and standardise Workers Compensation legislation to ensure that employers and mature-aged workers are not disadvantaged by explicit and implicit age-based restrictions (i.e. cessation of entitlements upon reaching 65 years of age or pensionable age).***

¹⁶ NSW Committee on Ageing. 2001 *Too Young To Go*. Available at: http://www.maca.nsw.gov.au/pdf/too_young_to_go.pdf