

Stuck in Hospital, Forgotten in Budget

With a horror 2026/2027 State Budget looming, older Tasmanians are demanding real fixes to hospital bottlenecks, elder abuse, and age-friendly housing – not more finger pointing.

We're coming to the end of February, and the Tasmanian Government has ticked off much of its First 100 Days Plan. There have been welcome moves on cost-of-living relief, housing maintenance, volunteering and community infrastructure. For many older Tasmanians, this has provided some immediate breathing space after a bruising few years.

But the real test of this Government is yet to come.

The 2026/2027 State Budget is widely expected to be a horror set of numbers. We all know that when money is tight, budgets become moral documents. They tell us who and what is valued. Older Tasmanians are watching closely to see whether the talk of “respect” and “dignity” translates into the kind of long-term investment that will actually make ageing in this state safer, fairer and more affordable.

There are solid foundations to build on. Ongoing concessions for power, council rates, water and sewerage recognise that essential services must remain within reach for people on fixed incomes. Extra support for homelessness services and public housing maintenance acknowledges that secure, habitable housing is a basic right, not a luxury. Ticket to Wellbeing vouchers, free registration to Work with Vulnerable People and a new volunteering strategy all point to a vision of older people as active participants, not just service recipients.

The creation of the Older Tasmanians Ministerial Advisory Council is another important step. If it is properly resourced and listened to, it can be a powerful vehicle for the lived experience of older people to shape government decisions – including the tough ones that lie ahead.

One of those tough areas is the interface between health and aged care. Too many older Tasmanians are stuck in hospital beds for weeks or months, medically ready for discharge but unable to leave because there is no safe accommodation, no home-care package, or no aged care place available. That is bad for the person, bad for the hospital and bad for the budget. Tasmanians are tired of state and Commonwealth governments simply pointing the finger at each other.

They expect joint solutions: better discharge planning, step-down options, timely home-care support and a shared plan to fix the bottlenecks.

Yet there are other glaring gaps that cannot be ignored – especially when times are tight. Digital health and online government services are racing ahead but, without a dedicated digital inclusion plan for older Tasmanians, we risk entrenching a two-tier system: those who can navigate apps and portals, and those who are left on hold or left out.

A “digital first” strategy must be matched with real-world training, support and non-digital options.

We also still lack a coherent, age-friendly housing agenda. We talk about supply in general, but not enough about accessible design standards, rightsizing options and planning rules that support people to live close to services and community as they age. With the next budget likely to be brutal, the temptation will be to shelve these reforms. That would be a false economy. Desperate housing shortages, unsafe homes and social isolation all drive higher health and aged-care costs.

Tasmania also needs to get serious about preventing elder abuse. That means community education so people know the warning signs, where to go for help and what their rights are. It also means clear legal and regulatory protections – from powers of attorney to financial decision-making – that actually work in practice, not just on paper.

Transport remains another fault line. Half-price fares are welcome, but they do not help if the bus does not come, does not go where you need, or cannot be boarded safely with a frame or shopping trolley – and they do nothing for communities with no public transport at all.

Over the next few months, we’ll be hearing a lot about “hard choices”. Older people understand that reality better than most; they live it every day as they juggle bills, caring responsibilities and health challenges. What they expect in return is honesty, a seat at the table, and a clear plan that protects the essentials: safe housing, affordable basics, accessible health and aged care, and the chance to stay connected to community.

If the Government uses this window to lock in smart, future-focused reforms – on digital inclusion, age-friendly housing, transport, elder abuse and the hospital–aged care interface – then even a tough 2026/2027 Budget can be a turning point rather than a turning away. That is the opportunity before us. The question now is whether we will take it.

Brigid Wilkinson

CEO

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