

# Opinion OURS & YOURS

## New ministries abandon needs of older people

Following the state election, both major parties have disenfranchised a good portion of our population

Following the March state election and the subsequent announcements of the Tasmanian government and opposition parties' ministerial and shadow portfolios, I can't help but shake my head at the abandonment of Tasmania's older population. In their respective decisions on ministerial portfolios, both major parties have disenfranchised a good portion of our population.

What is glaringly absent is the inclusion of a minister for the ageing, despite Tasmania's significant demographic of people in the over 50 age bracket. This oversight not only reflects a lack of recognition for the needs of an ageing population but also raises serious questions about the government's and parliamentary opposition's commitments to adequately plan for the future.

According to demographic data, more than 40 per cent of Tasmania's population is over 50 years of age. This segment of our society plays a crucial role in our communities, contributing valuable skills, knowledge and experience. Yet, their voices seem to be muted in the political landscape, where issues concerning their wellbeing and quality of life are often sidelined or given minimal attention.

A dedicated minister for the ageing is not a symbolic gesture; it is a practical necessity rooted in the realities of our ageing community. Such a ministerial portfolio would be responsible for championing policies and initiatives that address the

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unique challenges faced by Tasmanians as they age, including healthcare, housing, employment, social inclusion, and access to the full range of services. It would also shine a light on ageing within our communities and encourage broader discussion about our experiences of the ageing journey.

One of the primary concerns with the absence of a dedicated minister is the potential for critical issues affecting older adults to be overlooked or deprioritised. The complexities of ageing, from health concerns, digital inclusion and social isolation, require focused attention and expertise, which a dedicated

minister and the state public services within the portfolio can provide.

Added to this, a minister for the ageing serves as a focal point for collaboration and co-ordination among government agencies, community organisations, and stakeholders involved in ageing-related issues. This collaborative approach is essential to developing comprehensive and effective strategies that address the multifaceted aspects of ageing, from health and social care to employment and, importantly, age-friendly infrastructure.

A minister for the ageing also ensures that older Tasmanians, which represent such a significant proportion of our communities, are not left behind in policy discussions and decision-making processes. The absence of such a portfolio risks marginalising the older cohort, overlooking their unique needs and contributions.

It is very disheartening to witness the oversight of such a crucial portfolio, especially at a time when the global population is ageing rapidly, presenting both challenges and opportunities for societies worldwide. The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the vulnerabilities and



Brigid Wilkinson



The oversight in not including a minister for ageing among the portfolios in the Rockliff Liberal government's new ministry not only reflects a lack of recognition for the needs of an ageing population but also raises questions about the government's commitments to adequately plan for the future, according to COTA. Picture: Getty Images

inequalities faced by older adults, making it imperative for governments to prioritise age-friendly policies and support systems.

In contrast to Tasmania's current political landscape, other Australian states and territories have recognised the need for a minister for the ageing within their government structures:

- The NSW government has a Minister for Seniors and Veterans, responsible for policies and services related to seniors and veterans.
- Victoria has a Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, overseeing policies and programs

related to disability, ageing and carers.

- Queensland has a Minister for Seniors, Communities, Disability Services, and the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships. The Minister for Seniors focuses on issues concerning older Queenslanders.
- South Australia has a Minister for Health and Wellbeing, who is responsible for health-related policies and services, including those for ageing populations.

- Western Australia has a Minister for Seniors and Ageing, focusing on

issues related to seniors and ageing populations.

- The ACT has a Minister for Seniors and Veterans, responsible for policies and services concerning seniors and veterans.
- The Northern Territory has a Minister for Senior Territories, focusing on the needs and concerns of older residents in the territory.

By installing a ministerial position dedicated to older people, the states and territories have demonstrated a commitment to proactive ageing policies and initiatives that promote active and healthy ageing, social

inclusion, and intergenerational solidarity.

I urge both the new Tasmanian government and the opposition to follow their example, reconsider this state's approach and rectify this glaring omission by establishing a dedicated portfolio. This decision would not only reflect a genuine commitment to the wellbeing of older Tasmanians but also show that our state is prepared to meet the evolving needs of our ageing population and that we are an age-friendly community.

Without doubt the absence of a

minister for the ageing in Tasmania's new ministerial portfolios is a missed opportunity to prioritise and address the diverse needs of older adults.

We are all on the ageing journey and it is time for our government to recognise and reward the valuable contributions of older Tasmanians and take proactive steps towards building an inclusive society for all of us.

**Brigid Wilkinson is the acting chief executive of Council on the Ageing Tasmania, advocating for the rights and wellbeing of older Tasmanians**