

Talking Point
19 March 2024

Tasmania – An Age Friendly State?

As we head to the polls this weekend, what thought have you given to older Tasmanians and what they see as important to their future? Have you chatted to your parents, your aunty, or your neighbour down the road about what concerns them, the gaps in services they experience and the things that may make a difference to their quality of life?

With almost 228,000 Tasmanians over the age of 50 (almost half the States population), we owe it to our older community members, as well as to our future selves, to pay attention to the issues that are impacting on their lives. Appropriate and affordable housing that adapts to support us to age in place, access to consistent primary healthcare in our local areas, practical strategies to assist with cost-of-living pressures, particularly rising electricity prices, and practical support to navigate aged care services and systems are just a few things that we hear when we talk to our members and the wider community. Sounds familiar? But for many older Tasmanians these challenges are acute due to limited income, ageist stereotypes, poor public transport, limited mobility, increased reliance on digital means and social isolation.

When we do not have these basic supports in place to assist people to age well the result can be a clogged healthcare system (largely within our hospitals), increased physical health conditions, reduced social contact, carer stress and potential premature admission to residential care. As a consequence, our communities are then not as age diverse as they could be. Older people become less visible in our communities.

Older Tasmanians have contributed to the amazing fabric of this state and continue to do so. They want to remain living independently at home and should be able to do so with supports and services delivered in a timely way. Being older should not restrict choice, independence and a good life.

During our 2022 statewide consultation, we heard from over 1,500 Tasmanians what they needed to age well in Tasmania. This feedback has heavily influenced our current election requests as well as our 2023 and 2024 Budget Priorities Statements. Older Tasmanians were clear that, just like anyone else, they want to be treated as individuals, with equal rights, and to have choices over their later years without ageist stereotypes defining their access to work, transport, healthcare and housing.

Disappointingly, progress on the next Strategy for Older Tasmanians has been slow. Government needs to provide greater resourcing and leadership in developing and releasing this strategy and associated action plans. It is time for whoever forms Government to recognise how vital it is that we start focusing on our older demographic, as well as on those that are approaching their older years, to ensure people have the right information, services and supports within a preventative focus and with State and Federal Governments working together to meet this need.

Tasmania could be a leader in this space. An age friendly state where older people are supported to live well in their later years whilst staying connected across age groups, intergenerationally by design. Given the large demographic cohort and increased issues and needs of a growing older population, COTA Tasmania would also like to see a Minister for Ageing be appointed. With the increased numbers in Parliament, now is the time to look at Ministerial portfolios and ensure that the needs of older Tasmanians are front and centre.

We believe that ageing is a time of opportunity, possibility and influence- but only if we all start to think and believe this. Whatever happens on March 23, COTA is keen to work with whomever holds power, parties and independents alike, to ensure older people are provided the equity of services and can be heard on issues that directly impact them.

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