



# Submission to the NSW Budget 2018-19

February 2018

## 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 around 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, quarterly 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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## Introduction

Almost half of New South Wales voters are aged 50 and over. Older people in NSW make a significant contribution to the states formal economy, in both employment and as consumers. NSW seniors also play a critical role in the informal economy, undertaking caring and volunteer activities among many others. Their concerns are unique and should not be ignored.

National Seniors submission to the NSW Budget has been developed with input from the National Seniors' NSW Policy Advisory Group (PAG). NSW PAG consists of representatives from the National Seniors membership across NSW. This submission presents the NSW Government with a concise set of recommendations for consideration as part of the budget process, relevant to key areas of concern for seniors in NSW.

## Health

- 1. Reduce waiting times in hospital accident and emergency departments.**
- 2. Reduce waiting times for elective surgery.**

National Seniors has received reports of older people waiting considerable time to receive treatment in accident and emergency departments. In some instances, we have had reports of people being left in corridors waiting for a bed and of others electing to attend private clinics, at significant personal cost, because of fears about waiting times.

National Seniors is also aware that many older people are waiting significant amounts of time to be admitted for elective surgery. Given that almost half of people aged 65 and over do not have private health insurance hospital cover<sup>1</sup>, it is clear that many older people will continue to rely on the public hospital system into the future.

Unfortunately, many are being forced to wait significant amounts of time to receive elective surgery interventions. NSW has consistently recorded the highest median waiting times for elective surgery of any state and territory<sup>2</sup>.

National Seniors believes that increased funding to NSW state hospitals is required to address waiting times in accident and emergency and for elective surgery.

If implemented, this will reduce pressure on accident and emergency departments and reduce co-morbidities and therefore reduce unnecessary future admissions.

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<sup>1</sup> An estimated 52.6 per cent of the Australian population held hospital treatment insurance as at June 2017  
Data sources: <http://www.apra.gov.au/PHI/Publications/Pages/Statistical-Trends.aspx> and  
<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/3101.0Jun%202017?OpenDocument>

<sup>2</sup> The median waiting time to admission in NSW increased from 49 days to 54 days from 2012-13 to 2016-17  
<https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/a7235c2d-3c90-4194-9fa1-b16edf7ff1f0/aihw-hse-197.pdf.aspx?inline=true> .

## Electricity prices

### 3. Provide a regulated price for electricity

National Seniors believes that a regulated price for electricity would reduce the risk of vulnerable older people paying more for their electricity than they should.

While it was hoped deregulation of retail electricity markets would lead to better prices for consumers, the truth is that vulnerable seniors often find it difficult to shop around and get a better price. The proliferation of complicated and complex offers makes finding the best deal challenging. In some instances, older consumers are worse off because the terms and conditions of market offers are confusing, misleading or difficult to compare.

A regulated price would assist vulnerable consumers who find it difficult to readily understand and compare complicated market offers. It would also help to overcome barriers to consumer choice arising from digital literacy deficits among some older people in NSW<sup>3</sup>.

## Transport

### 4. Commit to rejecting proposals to change fares and eligibility rules for the Gold Senior/Pensioner Opal card.

National Seniors was pleased the NSW Government placed a freeze on any increases to public transport fares and sought not to change public transport concession eligibility for seniors as proposed by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) in 2016.

National Seniors does not support the proposal by IPART to lift the \$2.50 daily fare cap for Gold Senior/Pensioner Opal card holders to \$3.60 and to set the cap at 40% of the Concession Opal weekday cap thereafter. This increase is too steep and would negatively impact on the mobility of older people in NSW.

We also do not support restricting eligibility for the Gold Senior/Pensioner Opal card to Pensioner Concession Card or NSW War Widow/er Card holders. Under this proposal Seniors Card holders would no longer be able to access concession fares on public transport. This change will restrict public transport use among older people.

### 5. Provide improved security on public transport

Many older people rely on public transport as their primary means of mobility especially as they get older.

Older people may seek to avoid using public transport because they feel concerned about their personal safety. Stronger measures are required to improve security on public transport to ensure it's a safe and enjoyable experience for all, but particularly for older people fearful of victimisation.

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<sup>3</sup> There are still many older people who do not or will never have access to the internet. A recent survey of the digital lives of older Australians has shown that 20 per cent of people aged 65 and over did not access the internet in the past 12 months (2014-15). Source: ACMA 2016 'Digital lives of older Australians' Accessed online 15 January 2018. <https://www.acma.gov.au/theACMA/engage-blogs/engage-blogs/Research-snapshots/Digital-lives-of-older-Australians>

## Housing

### **6. Investigate the impact of changes to strata laws in NSW on security of tenure for older people**

National Seniors has received numerous complaints from seniors regarding the recent changes to strata laws in NSW.

National Seniors is concerned about new laws which allow 75 per cent of owners to compel the remaining 25 per cent to sell or redevelop. We are worried that older strata owners who wish to remain will be forced to sell. This change will significantly impact older residents who tend to reside within aged apartment blocks which are more affordable and therefore more likely to be affected by this change.

National Seniors believes that lowering the threshold has reduced or removed security of tenure for both renters and owner-occupiers who do not wish to relocate.

## Aged care

### **7. Ensure that aged care facilities have a registered nurse on duty 24 hours-a-day 7 days-a-week**

Aged care quality is of significant concern to National Seniors members. National Seniors supports recent moves to reinstate the requirement to have a registered nurse on duty at all times in aged care facilities across NSW.

National Seniors believes that there has been a direct impact on vulnerable and elderly aged care residents now that registered nurses are not required to be on duty at all times. We are specifically concerned that limiting access to registered nurses will result in a decrease in the quality of care provided to elderly residents of aged care facilities.

National Seniors strongly believes that more residents will be admitted to hospital for the management and care of avoidable injuries or illnesses as a direct result of the withdrawal of registered nurse management, care and supervision.

We also believe that aged care residents will experience prolonged acute hospital stays and poor post-release care if registered nurses are not on duty to provide skilled, clinical care and management to aged care residents with complex high care needs.

This will unnecessarily place increased pressure on accident and emergency departments and on hospital resources.