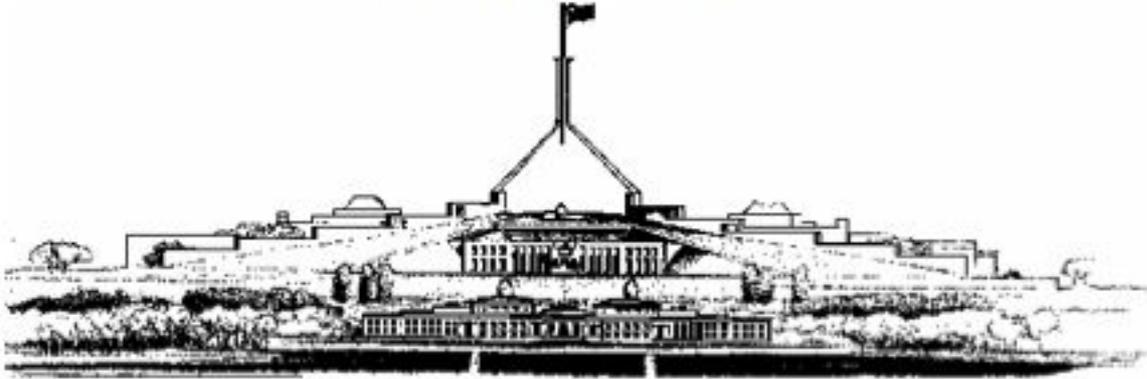




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

ADJOURNMENT

Senior Australians

SPEECH

Wednesday, 7 September 2022

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Wednesday, 7 September 2022	Source House
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Questioner	Responder
Speaker Scrymgour, Marion MP	Question No.

Ms SCRYMGOUR (Lingiari) (19:55): Last week I attended the Seniors Expo in Alice Springs as part of Seniors Month. Organised by the Council on the Ageing, or COTA, it was a hive of activity. There were the information stalls one would expect, but as well there were live performances, entertainment, displays, talks and so much more. It was full of colour and life. Being able to meet and talk to some of the elders brought home to me the contributions they make, as senior Territorians and, indeed, senior Australians, not just to their families but to their communities. A lot of those seniors have lived in Alice Springs most of their lives and made an immense contribution to that community.

COTA NT spoke to me about a regular survey that they do, the Cost of Living Survey. They survey all of their members across the Northern Territory. Their latest one showed that many seniors do not have any money left after paying for basic expenses, and this survey was conducted before the massive increase in inflation. There is much to do to address rising costs, but I'm pleased that the Albanese government has made some big announcements. The increase to the age pension, cheaper medicines and the ability to earn more whilst keeping the pension will address some long-term cost-of-living problems.

It was great to interact and talk with those seniors. There is still a lot that they want to contribute, particularly to some of the increasing youth issues that we see across Alice Springs. They've lived there most of their lives, so it was great to have a discussion about that. This week's announcement of an indexation increase to the age pension was so important. A rise of \$38.90 for singles and \$58.84 for couples will make a difference.

Another important decision that will help the financial health of older Australians is to allow those on a pension to earn more. Age and veteran pensioners will be able to earn an additional \$4,000 over this financial year without losing any of their pension. Once the legislation is passed, they can earn up to \$11,800 before their pension is reduced. Pensioners will also retain access to their pension concession card and associated benefits for two years. This is an important measure to ensure older Australians have the option to remain in the workforce, if they wish, without losing access to their pension and benefits.

The COTA Cost of Living Survey showed that medical expenses are a significant worry for seniors. The maximum cost to general patients for PBS medications has doubled since the year 2000—doubled, Mr Speaker!—and the previous government did nothing about it. This has resulted in seniors, and others, with medical conditions often delaying filling scripts or not getting medicines at all.

The government has made it easier for seniors. They will be among the millions of Australians who will pay less for their Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme scripts. The savings on just one medication script a month could be as much as \$150 a year. This is a real saving that will make a difference to all Australians, but especially seniors. I'm pleased to be part of a government that is delivering a strong healthcare system and support to senior Australians.

I want to acknowledge Sue Shearer, who is the CEO of COTA NT, Fran Kilgariff and all of the other directors of the COTA board in Alice Springs for the important work and advocacy that they provide for senior Territorians in Alice Springs, and certainly for the work and advocacy they do throughout the Northern Territory.

House adjourned at 20:00