



## MINISTER FOR TERRITORY FAMILIES

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### **Response to COTA's Election Asks**

#### **A Call for Investment in Six Key Areas**

A Territory Labor Government recognises Senior Territorians are a critical part of the fabric of our community and economy.

Senior Territorians deserve the recognition and support they need to lead a healthy, dignified and productive lives, whether in retirement, work, careers or volunteering.

The Territory Labor government is delivering services for seniors in the NT, which will incentivise seniors to stay in the Territory, which is important for our economy and community life.

#### **1. Liveable Communities**

##### ***Proper Funding for NGOs that Support Seniors***

Our Government recognises the important role that non- government organisations play in supporting Territorians, such as seniors and those who are socially disadvantaged. We came to Government with a commitment to increase funding certainty and the sustainability of NGOs. We have done this through:

- Expanding recurrent funding agreement for NGOs from short term and 3 year contracts to 5 Year Service Agreements, with annual indexation consistent with the parameters applied to NT Government Agencies
- Introducing a standard Grants Policy, Guidelines and Agreement for the funding of NGO across all government agencies; with improved conditions for NGOs

- Ongoing funding for organisations that support seniors, such as the Association of Independent Retirees and peak body funding (5yr agreement) for COTA NT.

We will continue to work in partnership with the NGO Sector and peak bodies to ensure a sustainable strong non-government sector.

### ***Healthy Aging Activities and Recreation***

A Territory Labor Government recognises that recreation and a healthy lifestyle is critical to the health and well-being of senior Territorians.

The NT Health Strategic Plan 2018-22, developed by our Government, has as one of its Priority Actions to promote healthy lifestyles and physical activity for older people through relevant public health and community led activities

In recognition of this, a Labor Government will work with COTA and other stakeholders to develop a Seniors Active Recreation Plan, mapped to the existing NT Active Recreation Strategy 2020-2024. We will work across government agencies to improve urban planning for active recreation, such as walking, exercising and cycling, to improve opportunities for all ages

We will continue to make recreation grants available to address the diverse recreation needs in the community, including people with inclusion needs, such as seniors and people with a disability.

### ***Appropriate and Affordable Housing***

Like the rest of Australia, the Territory is experiencing an increase in the proportion of seniors living in our community. Our vision is for senior Territorians to remain living in the Territory. We recognise the need for a greater range of affordable housing options for seniors, which assists seniors to live independently and to age in place, in a safe environment, with access to care and community support. To meet this need we:

- Invested \$500,000 funding into establishing seniors lifestyle accommodation in high needs areas across the NT
- Expressions of Interest to design and build new senior lifestyle accommodation, retirement villages in the identified high needs areas, of Alice Springs, Darwin urban and Darwin rural are underway, and will be constructed in the next term of a Labor Government
- Recently reached agreement with Lhere Artepe on a Land Use Agreement in Alice Springs, which includes the potential of residential social housing
- Over the next 4 years we will increase the amount of public housing available for seniors with an ongoing commitment to build more 1 to 2 bedroom public housing for seniors in Nightcliff, Palmerston, Tennant Creek and Katherine and to convert some existing public housing in Darwin to seniors housing
- We will continue the successful Room to Breathe program to allow family units to incorporate the needs of elderly family members in their design
- Other initiatives being looked at include:
  - reduced rate for lawn mowing for seniors in public housing
  - providing dwellings that allow room for the carers, and

- assisting seniors with a disability that are eligible for NDIA SDA, by releasing land under the legislative guidelines
- In 2019, we established the Community Geriatric Outreach Service in Palmerston Hospital, to support older people with complex care needs, residing in the community and in residential aged care, to minimise unnecessary admissions to hospital and or residential care. We will expand this trial to other regions to enable Territorians to live longer at home
- Have been working with the Australian Government to establish appropriate accommodation and care options in remote communities. A new 32 bed Flexible Aged care Facility will be built in Nhulunbuy, which will allow seniors in East Arnhem to age and be cared for on or close to country. Construction is due to commence in 2020 and is scheduled for completion in 2021

### ***Commonwealth Rental Assistance***

Our Government recognises that the cost of housing and rent varies considerably according to where you live, and that this places some older people at greater risk of inadequate housing, housing instability and homelessness. We will continue to lobby the Commonwealth Government to index medium house and rental prices in each regional area of the NT, rather than use an average Australian medium rental, to determine rental assistance.

## **2. Skills and Jobs**

Pre – retirees and seniors are the fastest growing group in the NT population. Our Population Growth Strategy (2018-2022) recognises the importance of retaining retirees and seniors to our economy and society. We are committed to both attracting seniors to the NT, including into the workforce and to retaining seniors in the workforce in the NT.

### ***Employer Champion***

Our Government has built a consistent approach to recruitment and retention of older workers across the Public Service. We launched the ‘Managing the Aging Workforce in the Northern Territory Public Service Policy Framework’ in 2017, aimed at supporting older workers to stay in the workforce.

We have also introduced unconscious bias training, including bias against older people, as compulsory training for recruitment panels in the NT Public Service. We have introduced transition to retirement plans and flexible work arrangements and there is no retirement age in the NT Public Service.

We have included older workers on our register of employment in the NT data base – for short term and medium term jobs, targeted at attracting older people interstate to the NT.

### ***Workforce Development Strategy***

As part of its Population Strategy Our Government has developed a ‘Workforce Strategy to Attract and Retain Workers’, including older workers to the NT. We recognise that the disability and aged care sector are growth industries, where there are a high number of older workers employed. Aged Care workers are on the NT Skilled Occupation Priority List. This provides

potential for further leveraging of employment of older people, through targeted training and recruitment.

Our Government has invested in an industry led Human Services Industry Plan. The plan is being developed in partnership with government agencies and is being led by NTCOSS, APONT, NT Shelter, NDS and NAAJA. This plan looks at the needs of the whole community sector.

We are happy to work with COTA to look at how the implementation of this Plan can ensure the needs of older workers are taken into account and to maximise employment opportunities for older people.

Our Government has also expanded access to its Business Growth Program to NGOs, including grants to improve their business. This program includes grants and mentoring around business planning, employment and governance solutions amongst others, and is open to all businesses in the NT.

We will continue to work with the Commonwealth Government, to look at avenues for increasing access to employment initiatives/ programs, such as VET and covid19 programs, for older people, aimed at getting mature aged workers back into the workforce, and retrained, and entering new career pathways.

***Changes to the Workers Compensation Act - to enable workers over 65 years to be covered by workers compensation.***

The Current Workers Compensation Act is tied to the age of retirement, classified by the Commonwealth under the Commonwealth Social Security Act 1991. In line with Our Population Strategy and in recognition that older people are working longer, we are happy to advocate to the Commonwealth Government and to explore with COTA options for taking this forward.

**3 Accessible Information Services: Tackling the Digital Divide**

New information and technology systems has rapidly changed the way Australians communicate. This poses challenges to a number of senior Territorians, who grew up and were trained in a different era.

Our Government has invested in the first ever Digital Territory Strategy and in annual action plans, aimed at increasingly connecting NT communities to the digital economy, and at building Territorians digital skills so they can maximise social and economic opportunities.

We will continue to provide opportunities for seniors as well as older workers to access training programs that address what are critical foundation skills for engaging in work, the economy and the community.

While at the same time as providing seniors with opportunities to train up in these skills, we will ensure that government information targeted at seniors is responsive and inclusive. This includes taking into account hearing and visual impairments, any disability needs; being accessible in remote communities as well as in regional towns and urban centres and, being available in a variety of communication forms. Communication forms will include: via the telephone, via radio and TV media; written hard copies in places frequented by older people, well- advertised face to

face information stands/ and one stop shops such as COTA. It also includes information being available in language via interpreters, outreach cultural workers or written translations.

We will continue to leverage the digital economy and industry, and expand mobile coverage across the NT. We will invest in tele- communication services for remote communities, including in affordable data communications.

#### **4 Planning for Change**

##### ***Invest in the design of future life planning, targeting NT Workplaces***

*Refer to 2: - Skills and Jobs – Government as Employer Champion - We launched the 'Managing the Ageing Workforce in the Northern Territory Public Service Policy Framework' in 2017, aimed at supporting older workers to stay in the workforce.*

##### ***Retirement Infrastructure in Regional Centres***

*Refer 1\_Liveable Communities. We have invested in retirement infrastructure – Senior Lifestyle Accommodation; including research by KPMG into the need in each region, with new retirement accommodation to be built in the identified high needs areas of Alice Springs, Darwin urban and Darwin rural community in 2020-2021.*

Future investment in other regions will be assessed, with any investment to occur in the second half of the 4-year term.

***Invest in Senior Parks:*** - to form part of the Seniors Active Recreation Plan, *as identified in 1. Liveable Communities*

##### ***Assisted Dying***

NT's Rights of the Terminally Ill Act was in force from 1996-to 1997, until the Australian Government overturned the legislation by removing the rights of territories to legislate on euthanasia. Subsequent attempts to revoke this legislation have not been supported by the Federal Parliament.

A Labor Government will continue to advocate to the Commonwealth Government on the wishes of the majority of senior Territorians and Territorians, to have the choice for legislated assisted dying options.

However - Our Government has put in place alternate ways to support people, wishing to determine the arrangements for their end of life care. The NT has implemented Advanced Personal Plans based on the Advanced Personal Planning Act 2013, which enables a person to make legally binding consent and alternate decision makers, when there are circumstances where the person cannot make these decision for themselves. This allows people to put these plans in place well in advance of end of life – which is such a stressful time.

The NT provides comprehensive, high quality palliative care services in the community. This includes a dedicated hospice in Darwin and a new palliative care centre built by our Government in Alice Springs.

## **5. A Safe NT**

### ***Elder Abuse***

Elder abuse has been recognised as a significant issue under Our Government's Reducing Domestic Family and Sexual Violence Reduction Framework 2018 – 2028. We have put in place:

- 1800ElderHelp phone line through Territory Families, as part of the new Territory Families triage phone line system- FaCES
- Funded Darwin Community Legal Service (DCLS) for 3 years to provide Older Persons Strategic Advocacy Project 2019-2022. This is Stage 2 of an Elder Abuse project, undertaken by DCLS and funded by our Government.
- For the first time our Government set up a DFSV prevention grant scheme of \$ 1mil a year, including grants with a focus on prevention of elder abuse

As part of RDFSVM Framework, Government has developed a workforce strategy. This will include provision of education awareness and training of organisations including generalist services, like health services, police, child protection, aged services and NGOs in elder abuse. It will also include improved coordination across government and non- government agencies in responding to elder abuse.

The NT is also contributing to cross-jurisdictional work under the National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians

### ***Mental Illness and Dementia Care***

Our Government has committed to improving mental health support for Territorians and we will continue this work. We have secured Australian Government funding to develop more beds and community services. The National Health Reform Agreement was co-signed with the Australian Government in June 2020 and includes \$30 million (capital) for a new inpatient facility in Darwin; and \$20 million for a new adult community mental health unit (\$5 million capital and \$15 million operational funding over 5 years).

This funding will provide for the implementation of new models of urgent care needed to support people with mental illness in more suitable ways for faster treatment and reintegration in the community; and increase inpatient capacity in-line with the Royal Darwin Hospital Clinical Services Plan.

Further consultation will occur to determine how this funding can best be utilised to meet the needs of Territorians. It will include a Stabilisation, Assessment and Referral Area, typically maximum stay of 72 hours for assessment and establishment of community support and then discharge, with follow-up care provided by Community Mental Health Teams.

Currently there are no residential care options for aged people with significantly challenging behaviours. The Australian Government has committed to establishing a Specialist Dementia Care Unit in Darwin. Unfortunately no tenders for this service were received in 2019. NT Health continues to work with the Australian Government in preparation for the next tender round expected to open in 2021.

## **6. Cost of Living**

The Northern Territory Government has implemented the most generous concession and subsidy scheme.

We inherited a flawed, unfair scheme that was open to fraud by businesses and users. We have replaced it with two schemes. The Seniors Recognition Scheme, a new scheme, not in place before, which acknowledges the contribution seniors make to Territory society and economy. Through this scheme, for the first time, all seniors can access \$500 towards the cost of a range of services, such as travel, fuel, utilities, and telecommunications. We have also increased the range of vendors and choices for seniors.

From July 2020, a new pre- paid debit card will be issued annually to all Seniors Card holders. Over the next 4 years, we are looking at expanding the types of services able to be purchased under the Seniors Card, to energy saving devices and veterinary services. All senior Territorians are eligible for this \$500 subsidy.

We transferred to COTA, through grant funding, the administration of the Seniors Card, including encouraging the participation of more Territory businesses, to offer discounts to seniors and the production/ distribution of the annual Seniors Card Business Directory.

The pensioners and carers concession scheme, on the other hand, is designed to benefit those most vulnerable in our society and is not specifically aimed at seniors. Of course, many aged pensioners benefit from it and are able to use it to pay for utilities and other needed services.

**1.5 JUL 2020**