

NEW SOUTH WALES DIVISION

The Association of Independent Retirees (AIR) is the national peak body representing current and future part and fully self-funded retirees and the NSW Division of AIR welcomes this opportunity to provide this submission, as requested, to the NSW Government Minister for Seniors the Hon. Mark Couré.

Preamble to this submission

AIR works to advance and protect the interests of Australians seeking independence in retirement.

AIR seeks to secure recognition and equity for those in our senior's community who, through their diligence and careful management, partly or fully self-fund their own retirement needs.

On the subject of overall needs of Senior's in NSW, AIR acknowledges the COTA NSW submission on the recommendations that are based on the four focus areas as detailed in the NSW Government's **Ageing Well in NSW: Seniors Strategy 2021 – 2031** of living in age friendly environments; participating in inclusive communities; staying safe, active and healthy; and being resilient and well-informed.

The recommendations to the NSW Government from COTA were:

- Increasing the investment in social housing, provide a specialist older persons housing information and support service and lower the priority age from 80 years
- Support initiatives to increase energy efficiency in housing
- Develop a mature-aged entrepreneurship and small-business start-up program
- Support the implementation of tools to assist businesses to employ, support and retain older workers
- Investing in exercise programs and alcohol awareness programs for older people
- addressing the digital divide by expanding the Tech-Savvy Seniors program and advertising on radio and in newspapers.

AIR NSW support these COTA recommendations and subsequent to this we are raising additional equally important specific issues, concerns and inequities in this submission regarding the specific section of the NSW senior's community of those who now and in the future in NSW will in part or fully self-fund their retirement and is specific to those in NSW who are in part or fully self-fund their retirement.

This specific community section that AIR represents is rapidly increasing in numbers and we believe there will be in excess of 1 million individuals in NSW in 2031 who will be in part or fully self-funding their retirement. With this group the situation is that the greater majority are not "wealthy" retirees who some may suggest are and do need the NSW Government's support and action on the specific issues, concerns and inequities we are raising in this submission.

In compiling this submission, we do so with the understanding that AIR's submission is focused only on this specific area of NSW seniors and that we do not seek to represent all segments of the community of NSW senior in this submission.

We in AIR in NSW understand the environmental, health, financial and longevity issues our AIR members face in retirement, especially with our members desire to maintain an active, secure and independent life for the whole of their retirement. Our NSW branches and members activities inclusively support the four focus areas detailed in the NSW Government's **Ageing Well in NSW: Seniors Strategy 2021 – 2031**.

Recommendations from The Association of Independent Retirees NSW Division:

- 1. That the NSW Government extend the availability of all existing rebates for items such as Drivers Licence renewal, Private Vehicle Registration, Electricity, Gas, Council Rates, Water Rates, Hearing Aids, etc that are received by Part Aged Pensioners, to those retirees in NSW who are holders of the Commonwealth Seniors Health Card.**

This need is a significant financial support issue for Self-Funded retirees whose assets are just above to qualify level to receive a commonwealth part age pension.

The Commonwealth Seniors Health Card (CSHC) has a strict age, income and asset qualifying level. CSHC holders are normally retirees who would pass the income test to receive the part Age Pension but fail the asset test. They have limit income to provide for themselves in retirement especially as they age.

We believe there is an issue with the NSW Local Government Act in moving to provide the needed change in rebates and concession.

All local government authorities, specific government agencies and utilities we are told, are compelled by the Act to operate within a specific list that details to whom rebates and concession can be provided to. The act right now does not include Commonwealth Seniors Health Card holders.

However, there are now precedents that have been set to support our recommended claim to make this change, by both the Federal and NSW Governments where:

- Over the past two years by the Federal Government has formally including CSHC holders in the umbrella of "concessional card holder" for Federal rebates and special payments.
- Over the same period the NSW Government has provided a \$200 rebate to help CSHC holders in NSW with their energy costs using the Seniors Energy Rebate where CSHC holders can apply and receive this specific rebate energy annually.

Thus, our recommendation to the NSW Government to accept the precedents and to make this change and introduce the procedures that will provide for all NSW rebates to be available to NSW CSHC holders.

- 2. That the NSW Government to extend the availability of all rebates for items such as Drivers Licence renewal, Private Vehicle Registration, Electricity, Gas and Council Rates, Water Rates, Hearing Aids, etc that are received by Part Aged Pensioners, to all NSW Seniors Card Holders who are 80 years or older.**

Refer to the details contained in recommendation 1

3. That the NSW Government need to change the annual collection method of the Fire and Emergency levy to a more equitable method and move away from this being charged as an addition to the renewal premium of residents Home and contents Insurance.

With so many homes in NSW under insured or failing to be insured at all, a far more equitable method is needed by the NSW Government for the collection of the needed annual funding for providing emergency and fire services within the community.

Currently this annual levy is recovered via a % fee of the home insurance premium paid by individual house holders and this is totally inequitable.

What is needed is a more equitable fee collection method where every houseowner and landlord pays equally (just like with council services) for the provision of these services in their LGA and the NSW government collection method for the funding of emergency and fire services is not just a discriminately applied to recover this from a select percentage of the community who are properly insuring for the full replacement value of their home.

4. That the NSW Government review and modify the additional charges for home insurance and addressing the stamp duty and the issue why so many are deciding to under insure or not insure at all.

The NSW Government needs to review the additional cost in the insurance renewal for home and home content. For example, where the premium to be paid for the full replacement value is say \$3400, this premium includes the Fire and Emergency Levy (\$337), plus GST (\$33.70), GST on the insurance charge and NSW Government stamp duty on this renewal (\$280).

These additional cost to residents with their annual home ownership replacement insurance is an issue. This is insidious and is unfairly inflating the cost of such insurance. No wonder there is a view that a high percentage of residents in NSW are now either under insuring or not insuring at all and especially that they are not contributing at all or only partially the Fire and Emergency Levy.

5. That the NSW Government, with its stated intent to work towards eliminating stamp duty on residential housing and unit purchases and introduce a new annual property tax, it is imperative with this for NSW Seniors that this will only be for new property purchases and unit purchases and that the NSW Government doesn't make the annual property tax proposal retrospective for those who prior to its introduction had paid the stamp duty when purchasing their primary residential home.

6. That the NSW Government continue to support the NSW Gold Seniors Opal card system as this has been of outstanding benefit and wonderful support for our members who qualify for the NSW Seniors Card. We seek assurances from the NSW Government that for 2022/2023 that the \$2.50 maximum daily fee will be retained into the foreseeable future as will the regional NSW seniors travel card for those seniors living in regional, rural and remote areas of NSW be also retained.

For any further information or discussions on this please contact Robert Curley, NSW President of the Association of Independent Retiree on 0419 424875 or email curley@wix.com.au

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