



SUBMISSION TO
SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO
COMMISSION OF AUDIT

Prepared by
COTA National Policy Office

January 2014

COTA Australia

Authorised by: Ian Yates AM
Chief Executive

Prepared by: Jo Root
National Policy Manager

GPO Box 1583
Adelaide SA 5001
08 8232 0422

www.cota.org.au

INTRODUCTION

COTA Australia is the national policy vehicle of the eight State and Territory Councils on the Ageing (COTA) in NSW, Queensland, Tasmania, South Australia, Victoria, Western Australia, ACT and the Northern Territory.

COTA Australia has a focus on national policy issues from the perspective of older people as citizens and consumers and it seeks to promote, improve and protect the circumstances and wellbeing of older people in Australia.

COTA Australia was invited to put a submission into the National Commission of Audit and did so by the due date. A copy of that submission is attached for the Committee's information and has been published on the COTA website. COTA has not met with the Commission.

ISSUES

In our submission we acknowledged that the ageing of the population is going to put pressure on some aspects of government expenditure. To address these challenges there needs to be a whole of government plan on ageing that looks at opportunities to ensure older people fully participate in our society and economy. It is important that there is a longer time agenda and decisions are not made to deal with immediate budgetary pressure that create both expenditure and revenue problems in the longer term.

The other general issue is that the Government has either commenced or flagged its intention to commence a number of other reviews in key areas of expenditure and activity including welfare reform, a tax white paper, the Productivity Commission's inquiry into child care and Medicare Locals. It is not clear if the Commission of Audit's work will inform those reviews or be informed by them, or neither.

Process

The first concern we have is the timeframe given for the Commission to complete what is a very comprehensive look at Commonwealth expenditures. We believe the Commission should continue for a longer period to allow for a thorough examination of the issues.

We welcomed the broad terms of reference but believe the time given for submissions was far too short for many organisations, particularly non-government bodies, to prepare comprehensive submissions. It made it difficult for us to fully consult across our membership to identify what older people thought was important.

The short time frames have obviously constrained the Commission in terms of the number and nature of its consultations, which is unfortunate.

Our second concern is around transparency. It has been our understanding that the reports will be confidential to Government and not be released before the Federal Budget in May. As we finalise this submission media articles indicate that the reports may be released earlier than this. COTA believes that the Commission's reports could make a valuable contribution to public debate and should be released earlier. It is hard to comment on many of the Committee's terms of reference without knowing either what is in submissions to the Commission or what it is going to recommend.

Impacts

We are concerned that that the terms of reference did not require the Commission to look explicitly at the distributional impact of any recommendations it might make. In our submission we urged them to ensure that they explicitly take account of the impact of their recommendations on older people, not just now but into the future. Whilst accepting that older people are not a homogenous group and so individuals are impacted differently by policy changes we think it is important that the Commission take account of intergenerational impacts.

For each recommendation there should be an explicit statement of who benefits and who loses. There also needs to be some attempt at aggregation so it is possible to get an understanding of the overall impact of the package of changes.

CONCLUSION

Overall COTA believes that the work of the Commission could make a valuable contribution to shaping our society into the future. We await its findings and the Government's response to them with interest.