

Quality for Life

Redressing Labor's Neglect in Ageing

Canberra**liberals**

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Quality for Life

The Liberal Action Plan

A Canberra Liberal Government will respond to the needs of seniors to ensure that they have appropriate support and to enhance their participation in community life. Through our work in the community and through consultation with seniors, we have identified the areas of dental health services, housing, transport and income support as the major issues facing Canberra's aging population.

This policy includes a number of reforms that are part of a comprehensive plan to assist the growing population of older Canberrans.

- The Canberra Liberals will invest more than **\$1.7 million to address the dental health** needs of Older Canberrans. Up to \$1000 worth of dental care will be provided each year for 500 older Canberrans on the aged pension or with a Commonwealth Seniors Health Card. A portion of this funding can be used for providing transport assistance to bring older and frail residents to dental appointments.
- We will establish and monitor a **Waiting List for aged accommodation**, to assist in access to and forward planning of appropriate accommodation. And we will also permit older Canberrans who are still in the workforce to register their interest in a place in an ACT Housing Aged Persons Unit, where they will be on a pension or another form of low income after retirement.
- We will establish a long-term **“land bank” of sites that are reserved for future Retirement Villages and aged care accommodation**. We will seek to identify sites across Canberra's urban spread, in order to allow retirees to remain close to the communities where they have established social connections and where their own children and grandchildren have settled.
- **We will identify existing multi-unit ACT Housing properties where accommodation can be better dedicated to older residents**, where community services can be focussed and where social clubs can be formed.
- We will negotiate with developers to discuss **options for dedicating a portion of affordable housing for older residents**, particularly in areas close to shops and other services.
- We have committed \$19.8 million towards the three new After-Hours GP Clinics and a range of incentives to address the shortage of 60 GPs in Canberra.
- We will devote **\$100,000 to a study to identify transport options to help elderly people move around their neighbourhoods**, visit friends and access services. The Council on the Ageing ACT Inc will be involved in oversight of the study.
- We will **re-establish an Office of Ageing** in the Chief Minister's Department and the Liberal Chief Minister will be designated as the Minister for Ageing.
- The Office of Ageing will assist peak groups representing older Canberrans with the **preparation of submissions to the Commonwealth reviews** into the aged pension and the indexation arrangements for superannuation pensions.

Dental Health

Changes to the Commonwealth dental scheme, especially the scrapping of the dental program for people with chronic illnesses will put considerable pressure on older Australians in need of dental care.

The Canberra Liberals will address the backlog in dental work among older Canberrans by investing more than \$1.7 million, over the next four years, into addressing their dental health needs. Priority will go to cases that involve the greatest medical need.

The assistance would be available to aged pensioners and holders of the Commonwealth Seniors Health Card and in the first full year of operation will provide up to \$1000 worth of dental care each year for 500 older Canberrans in need. A portion of this funding can be used for providing transport assistance to bring older and frail residents to dental appointments.

	2008-09 \$000	2009-10 \$000	2010-11 \$000	2011-12 \$000	Total \$000
Extra dental funding for retired Canberrans	200	500	515	530	1745

Transport

Transport as one of the keys to maintaining social contact and wellbeing. The “hub and spoke” model of public transport provided by ACTION does not necessarily meet the needs of people who are aging, when a trip to the next suburb may involve multiple bus journeys through an interchange. Currently there are no solutions to assist movement across the “spokes”. A Canberra Liberal Government will work with senior citizens organisations and clubs to establish better transport initiatives aimed at providing mobility and social contact for older Canberrans.

We will devote \$100,000 to study and develop demand-responsive transport systems aimed at maintaining mobility for Canberra’s aging population. The Council on the Ageing ACT Inc will be involved in oversight of the study and the research will be used to examine options to help elderly people move around their neighbourhoods, visit friends and access services.

	2009-10 \$000	Total \$000
Transport study	100	100

Housing

For years Canberrans have struggled to gain ACT Government approval for important projects to provide aged accommodation. While there are now improvements in the system, there is still a great deal of uncertainty about the future planning of aged accommodation.

An Accommodation Waiting List

In 2004 the Planning and Environment Committee of the Legislative Assembly made a number of recommendations in its report *Long-term Planning for the Provision of Land for Aged Care Facilities in the ACT*. The Stanhope Government has never responded to the report and steadfastly refused to implement one of its most important recommendations in relation to planning.

For the past four years the Stanhope Government has ignored the following key recommendation in the report. "In order that the Government is able to accurately assess the need for residential aged care, the Committee recommends that the Government maintain waiting lists for both high and low care places..."¹


A Canberra Liberal Government will work with aged care providers to establish and monitor a Waiting List for aged accommodation, to assist in access to and forward planning of appropriate accommodation, be it private, community or public housing.

We will also permit older Canberrans who are still in the workforce to register their interest in a place in an ACT Housing Aged Persons Unit, where they will be on a pension or another form of low income after retirement. Older Canberrans should not be forced to choose between maximising their contribution to the workforce and getting future access to appropriate retirement accommodation.

Housing Affordability

One of the most vulnerable groups in the community is aged renters in the private rental market. Some renters in this category have assets that put them beyond the access to public housing but insufficient assets to buy a property. About 5% of the 44,000 Canberrans over 55 fall into this category.

Although overdue, the Canberra Liberals support the announcement on 14 August 2008 of a study into options to increase the supply of affordable housing for older Canberrans. In government the Canberra Liberals will accelerate this work and consult widely with the community on the implementation of affordable housing strategies for older Canberrans.



A Canberra Liberal Government will seek to establish a long-term “land bank” of sites that are reserved for future Retirement Villages and aged care accommodation. We will seek to identify sites across Canberra’s urban spread, in order to allow retirees to remain close to essential services and to the communities where they have established social connections and where their own children and grandchildren have settled. We will seek amendment of the Territory Plan to allow for appropriate zoning changes and we will consult with local communities to seek support before changes are made.

Social Inclusion

Loneliness is a particularly concerning problem among older Canberrans who have exited the workforce and who have seen their children leave home. Disengagement from the community can contribute to depression and poor health. The Canberra Liberals believe that it is important that government policy and planning encourages community-building, as a means of strengthening the wellbeing of residents.

A Canberra Liberal Government will consult with older Canberrans in public housing, to identify existing multi-unit properties where accommodation can be better dedicated to older residents, where community services can be focussed and where social clubs can be formed.

The ACT Government has required developers in some new housing estates to dedicate a certain portion of housing stock as affordable housing. However the requirement for affordable housing is a generic requirement and little thought has been given to targeting a portion of stock to older Canberrans.

We will also negotiate with developers on options for dedicating a portion of affordable housing for older residents, particularly in areas close to shops and other services. We will also explore options to make affordable housing amenable to use by older or disabled residents and to minimise any future costs for retrofitting disabled access.

GP Clinics

Senior Canberrans are usually on limited fixed incomes and therefore have a particularly strong need for access to bulk billing GP services. Year after year the ACT has been bottom of the interstate league when it comes to bulk billing.

- In 2006 only 48% of non-referred GP visits were bulk billed in the ACT.
- This was 14.2% below the next lowest state or territory result and 28.6% below the national average.

After hours services are particularly tough to come by in Canberra. The few large private GP practices tend to be in very central locations and shut their doors no later than 10pm. Most small practices operate hours that correspond to normal business hours, many do not bulk bill and many do not take new patients who walk in without an appointment. Access to a major component of our public health system ends when the sun goes down. But Canberrans do not choose when they fall sick. The Canberra Liberals believe that there is a role for public provision of GP services after dark. We will act to correct the current market failure which Stanhope Labor has allowed to develop.

A Canberra Liberal government will commit \$19.8 million towards the operating costs for three new After-Hours GP Clinics, and \$5.9 million to purchase medical equipment and to fund the fitout of leased premises.

The three new after-hour centres will be based in South Tuggeranong, Gungahlin and West Belconnen, based on greatest distance from Canberra's hospitals and based on the shortage of regular GP services in these three geographic areas. The hours of operation for our public GP Centres will be based around filling the market gap when private GP services do not operate.

Older Canberrans are particularly vulnerable to sickness and do not have the stamina of younger people to wait for hours at night in a hospital emergency department. The three new GP clinics will be safe environments that are supported by security staff. All centres will include secure entry areas adjacent to reception to protect receptionists and patients. Car parks and access points around the centres will also be fitted with security lighting and CCTV cameras.

A Canberra Liberal Government will also address the daytime shortage of GPs in Canberra by establishing an incentive fund to provide up to 60 grants of \$75,000 each to attract GPs from interstate to relocate to Canberra. These grants will be made available in 2008-09 to attract new doctors at the earliest opportunity.

And a Canberra Liberal Government will establish a Young GP Entrepreneurs Fund to provide low interest loans to young GPs who have received their medical training in the ACT or undertaken an internship here and who wish to establish a medical practice within the borders of the ACT or to buy into a partnership.

Office of Ageing

Under the Stanhope Government the interests of our aging population have not been a priority. Labor has divided ageing issues among a number of portfolios, for instance aged care and rehabilitation issues are the responsibility of the Minister for Health. Whenever the Chief Minister is asked about Ageing issues, he constantly says that responsibility for service delivery lies with another Minister.

In order to ensure that policy on our aging population receives appropriate attention at the most senior level of decision-making, a Canberra Liberal Government will re-establish an Office of Ageing in the Chief Minister's Department. A Liberal Chief Minister will be designated as the Minister for Ageing and will act as an advocate for the sector in Cabinet.

Income support

The Canberra Liberals are acutely aware of the constraints placed on older Canberrans by inadequate income support.

A Canberra Liberal Government will make a strong contribution to the current Commonwealth reviews of the aged pension and the review of the indexation arrangements for superannuation pensions. We will also provide support through the Office of Ageing to assist key groups in the ACT to make submissions. Residents in the ACT face particularly high costs of living and particular difficulty finding affordable accommodation.

A Canberra Liberal Government will require the Office of Ageing in the Chief Minister's Department to assist relevant groups based in the ACT with the preparation of submissions to the Commonwealth reviews into the aged pension and the indexation arrangements for superannuation pensions.

We look forward to seeing the recommendations that come out of these inquiries and to the response of the Federal Government to the recommendations.



Quality for life

Canberrans who retire from the full-time workforce can offer many active years of contribution to their community. The Canberra Liberals see the aging of our population as an opportunity. We wish to encourage ongoing engagement within the community for the benefit of all. A Liberal Government will encourage older Canberrans to remain in contact with the paid work force, as well as contributing through volunteering and mentoring programs.

Flexible work practices

In the areas where we have influence over employment practices, a Canberra Liberal Government will implement truly flexible working hours to enable older Canberrans to remain in the workforce and can transition to retirement.

Retraining as teachers

The Canberra Liberals will encourage older Canberrans who want to make a career change to retrain as teachers. This will help to address skill shortages, especially in maths, science and IT, as well as bring a wealth of experience into our schools. We have committed \$2.2 million over four years to attract mature aged professionals into a second career in the teaching profession.

Volunteers and Mentors

We will also promote and support volunteering and the community support schemes that run in schools like Canberra College's CC Cares program to encourage inter-generational interaction, mentoring and positive role models for young people.