

The Liberals' Seniors Policy

Supporting Western Australia's Seniors

MAKING DECISIONS
GETTING THINGS DONE
SECURING WA'S FUTURE



Policy Summary

There are more than 395,000 seniors (60 years and over) living in Western Australia, accounting for 17.7 per cent of the State's population. This is forecast to grow to 21 per cent by 2020.

The elderly in our community make important contributions to society and they deserve support, respect and protection. They are, and will always be, vital to the social and economic well-being of the State as workers, volunteers, neighbours, friends, carers, parents, and grandparents.

Seniors however, face a range of unique pressures. An increasing number are living alone, some are at risk of social isolation, and a number of households have growing concerns with cost of living pressures. Others have taken on the role of carer to their grandchildren, often receiving little or no financial support or recognition for the vital role they play.

The Liberal-led Government has made a significant investment in supporting our seniors, including expanding Seniors Card eligibility and concessions, establishing the Safety and Security Rebate and introducing free public transport for seniors during non-peak times.

A re-elected Liberal Government will build on these measures with a range of new financial, security and health initiatives.

A re-elected Liberal Government will also:

- Introduce a \$5.3million Grandcarers Scheme and increase funding for grandcarer respite
- Extend the Seniors Safety and Security rebate to include a broader product range and allow seniors to access the rebate again if burgled
- Extend the \$200 Cost of Living Allowance to people in group living arrangements
- Annually index the Country Age Pension Fuel Card to CPI
- Allocate an additional \$280,000 over four years for activities supporting seniors to stay active and fit

Grandcarers Support Scheme

If re-elected, the Liberals' will:

- Allocate \$5.3million for a Grandcarers Support Scheme
- Provide an additional \$600,000 over four years for Wanslea's Grandcare program

Some grandparents selflessly take on the full time role of caring for their grandchildren and giving the love and kind of support that no government can provide.

It is estimated that each year 200 children are in informal relative care under the approval of the Department of Child Protection (DCP), where a Safety and Well-being Assessment has been undertaken and a safety plan developed that provides for the child to remain with the relative.

There are also arrangements where grandparents assume full time responsibility for their grandchildren where DCP has not become or needed to become formally involved with those children.

These grandparents receive little – if any - financial support. The Liberals' recognise the valuable role these grandparents play and if re-elected, will introduce a grants scheme to support them in this important job. This will provide \$400 a year for the first grandchild aged under 16 years and \$250 for every other child to go towards education expenses and for extracurricular activities such as entrance fees to events and outings.

The grants under this \$5.3million scheme will be available from July 2013 and be administered by a non-government organisation.

This commitment follows the one-off \$1000 Establishment Payment announced in February 2011, awarded to relatives who care for children who otherwise might have been placed in State care.

The Liberals' also recognise the importance of time out for these grandcarers and if re-elected, will provide an additional \$600,000 over four years to Wanslea for its Grandcare program.

This will fund respite camps, farm stays, retreats or opportunities for grandparent carers to network with other grandparents in the same situation.

Safety and Security

If re-elected, the Liberals' will:

- Increase funding for the Safety and Security Rebate to \$15million over four years to cover the purchase of personal safety alarms, and to provide further assistance for seniors whose homes have been burgled

The Seniors Safety and Security Rebate was introduced by the Liberal-led Government in 2009. This provides up to \$400 to seniors for the purchase of a specified range of security and safety devices, including home intruder alarms, deadlocks, security door screens and fire extinguishers.

Since its inception, more than 36,000 applications have been approved and almost \$7million paid in rebates.

Following feedback from seniors, the Liberals' have committed to improving the rebate and, if re-elected, will increase funding to \$15million over four years. This will provide an additional \$200 for seniors if they have been broken into after already accessing the rebate, and will allow it to be used to purchase personal security devices.

Cost of Living Assistance Payment

If re-elected, the Liberals' will:

- Extend the Cost of Living Assistance payment to people living in retirement villages and group homes that are on-sold electricity

In the 2012-13 Budget, the Liberal-led Government provided \$286million over four years for a Cost of Living Assistance (CoLA) payment to help reduce electricity bills for a large number of Western Australian households in need.

Western Australian households that hold a Western Australian Seniors Card, a Department of Veterans Affairs Gold Card, a Pensioner Concession Card, a Health Care Card or a Commonwealth Seniors Health Card are eligible for a payment of \$200 per year.

The Cost of Living payment represents a 35 per cent increase on the previously available supply charge rebate.

If an eligible person has dependent children, they are also entitled to a dependent child rebate which varies from \$307 per year to \$434 per year depending on the number of children.

Under the previous supply charge rebate, people living in retirement villages and group homes that are on-sold electricity (with the exception of permanent caravan park owners) were not eligible for the rebate. This is clearly an anomaly and, if-re-elected, the Liberals' will act to ensure the Cost of Living Payment is extended to these people. The full \$200 payment will be made for the 2012-2013 financial year. This is expected to benefit more than 25,000 households.

Country Age Pension Fuel Card Indexation

If re-elected, the Liberals' will:

- Index the popular Country Age Pension Fuel Card to CPI, taking the total value of the card to \$103million over the next four years

The Country Age Pension Fuel Card provides eligible pensioners in regional areas of Western Australia with up to \$500 a year towards the cost of fuel and/or taxi travel.

The scheme was introduced in recognition that country pensioners do not have the same access to public transport as those who live in the metropolitan area.

Some 50,000 people currently receive the card.

The Liberals' have recognised that the value of the card over time must be protected and if re-elected, will annually index the entitlement to ensure that its real value is retained.



Support for Seniors' Fitness

If re-elected, the Liberals will:

- Provide an additional \$280,000 over four years to the Seniors Recreation Council to help seniors keep fit and active

Remaining healthy and having access to stimulating recreational activities are vital for the quality of life of our seniors. Additionally, keeping active improves health outcomes and reduces pressure on Western Australia's health system.

The Liberal Government will increase funding to the Seniors Recreation Council to support its Healthy Ageing through Activity programs by \$70,000 per annum, taking the total investment over four years to nearly \$530,000. This will enable the council to provide its important active recreation programs to more seniors.

Activities run by the council include pole walking (walking with ski-type poles), exercise classes, adapted games in a community recreation facility, and Have a Go Day, a free event that offers sporting and recreation activities to encourage people to join a sport or recreation club.

Our Record

The Liberals' have a strong record in Government of supporting seniors. These achievements include:

- Expanding the eligibility criteria for the Seniors Card allowing seniors working 25 hours or less per week (averaged over 12 months) to apply for the card
- Providing \$112million for a range of schemes to reduce the cost of living for seniors, including:
 - The Hardship Utility Grants Scheme
 - The Cost of Living Assistance payment
 - The Cost of Living Rebate
 - The Country Age Pension Fuel Card Scheme
 - The Seniors Safety and Security Rebate
 - Free public transport for all seniors and Aged and Disability Support pensioners during off peak hours and all day on weekends- with more than 21 million free trips taken by seniors since April 2009.
- Introducing a one-off \$1000 Establishment Payment for relatives who agree to care for children who would otherwise have been placed in State care.