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Access to dental services key to health outcomes for older Australians

Aged & Community Services Australia agrees with the Council on the Ageing (COTA) report *The State of the (Older) Nation 2018* identifying access to health services, particularly preventative oral and dental health, as key contributors to quality of life for older Australians whether they are living at home or in residential aged care.

The report identifies access to health services (including mental health services), preventative health programs, and measures aimed at improving financial security as key areas impacting on the wellbeing of the older population.

“Today’s COTA report highlights the strong link between physical health and quality of life for older Australians but also singles-out access to oral and dental health as an area to improve upon if we’re serious about improving health outcomes for older people,” said ACSA CEO Pat Sparrow.

The report found dental services remains the most difficult health service to access, with 6 per cent of those 2,562 older persons (Aged 50 years and over) in the survey unable to access the services they wanted in the last year.

“ACSA has long advocated for improving the oral health of older people through prevention strategies which, in turn, will improve health outcomes,” said Ms. Sparrow. “Oral disease is one of the four most expensive preventable chronic diseases in Australia. There are many links between poor oral and poor general health including coronary heart risk, rheumatoid arthritis and diabetes mellitus.

“Reducing the incidence of oral disease is critical to improving health and wellbeing and reducing avoidable hospital admissions and costs to the acute health care sector.

“We agree with COTA’s assessment that better outcomes in preventative health, oral/dental health and healthcare services will contribute to an improved quality of life for all older people.”

Other areas identified as key to meeting the needs of older Australians include rising cost of living challenges, including renting and paying bills and access to affordable housing.

“We know the preference of many older Australians preference is to remain living independently in their community and this report feeds the mounting evidence that an increasing number of older Australians, in particular widows and single women, do not have secure or stable accommodation.

“Cost of living pressures are another area of concern for older Australians, particularly with rising rents and a lack of access to affordable housing. ACSA will continue to advocate that all levels of government need to implement a national housing strategy for older Australians to address this immediate and pressing need.”

Overall, ACSA says the inaugural *The State of the (Older) Nation 2018 Report* is a valuable resource capturing the views of large number of older Australians on key issues shaping the advocacy and policy environment for older Australians.

~ENDS~

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