

AUSTRALIA'S DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGE

A SUBMISSION BY John MacKean, President COTA Tasmania

COTA National Seniors has already made a submission to this Enquiry, and I make this submission as a private individual.

1. The most worrying aspect of the demographic shift for many older people, and for workers in the sector, is the reducing number of individuals joining the work force. Access Economics has estimated the number joining the Australian work force in 2001 at about 170,000. Access estimates the number joining during the *decade* beginning in 2021 at about 125,000. This reduction, of about 90 percent, seems to be common to all three series of population projections.
2. During the same decade, the number of "old old", the cohort aged 85 and over – will triple in Tasmania and the number aged 65 and over will more than double.
3. The Tasmanian aged care sector is already more than 10 percent understaffed, and more than one third of all residential aged care facilities are too financially stressed to compete for the workers they need.
4. The Australian Nursing Federation estimates that there are 30,000 vacancies for nurses which cannot be filled.
5. The shortages of nurses and for workers in aged care are such that very many of them are finding their job satisfaction and quality of life has been destroyed by the demands being placed upon them. There are no signs that this situation will improve. In fact, outmigration by nurses to other countries and other professions is increasing.
6. The lags between the allocation of funds for aged care places and the availability of new beds is now, and will increasingly, place pressure on the availability of HACC services.
7. The creation of new beds and the filling of new HACC contracts are both grossly affected by the availability of staff.
8. Domiciliary nursing, where nurses must rely on experience and their ability to respond to emergencies without back-up, calls for specialised training and selection processes. The number of domiciliary palliative care nurses, for example, is likely to triple or quadruple as more people either choose to die at home or are obliged to die at home. Other categories of domiciliary health professional will also be needed in increasing numbers.
9. **The population trends which produce these circumstances are well established. While there may be argument over precise estimates of numbers, the effects are undeniable.**
10. Much of the discussion connected with the demographic shift has concerned the budgetary effects, the dependency ratio, the share of GDP allocated to the sector and so on. There seems to be an acceptance without argument that the birthrate cannot be stimulated sufficiently to provide even micro-solutions.
11. This is surprising, given polling which demonstrates the attractiveness of settlement in Australia for very many young people. Australia is considered the most attractive migration destination by young people in the UK, for example.
12. Assisted migration schemes have worked well in the '50s and '60s, and we have a great deal of experience in settling new migrants now. Australia is particularly well placed to compete for suitable migrants.

13. Other population and migration policy problems concern the damaging rate of emigration by young Australians; a study of the trigger factors affecting this is needed urgently.
14. Among the most obvious deterrents and disincentives to the birthrate is the HECS debt. Tens of thousands of young women must delay childbearing until an age when their fertility is seriously reduced because they consider it imprudent to commit to marriage and parenting until they have some financial security.
15. This desire for security is fuelled by the lack of stable, full time work, especially for potential "heads of household" and those in blue collar occupations.
16. Australia, it is often pointed out, is many years away from facing the problems of a total fertility rate of 1.1 – as is the case in Japan and some European countries. Therefore we have time to take much needed preventive action.
17. **But this window of opportunity will not remain open for long, as the problems identified above proliferate and intensify.**