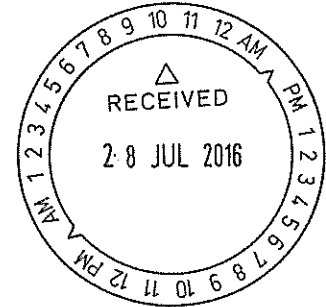




**The Hon Tony Simpson MLA
Minister for Local Government; Community Services;
Seniors and Volunteering; Youth**

Our Ref: 49-11666

Hon Simon O'Brien MLC
Chairman
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000



Dear Mr O'Brien *Simon*

PETITION NO 120 – COMMISSIONER FOR SENIORS

Thank you for your correspondence dated 23 June 2016 regarding the petition from Retirees WA Inc recommending that the State Government appoint a Commissioner for Seniors.

The population of Western Australia is ageing. In 2015, there were more than 473,703 people aged 60 years and over living in Western Australia. It is predicted that the proportion of Western Australian seniors will increase from 18.3 per cent currently to 23.6 per cent by 2041. It is evident that the abilities and needs of Western Australian seniors are as diverse as other population groups.

To effectively address this demographic change and the associated complex challenges, the Liberal National Government has put in place a range of initiatives to support seniors within the community.

My Seniors Ministerial Advisory Council (SMAC) advises the Government on a wide range of issues affecting seniors, including those matters outlined below. The SMAC represents a broad range of interests across the seniors community and plays a valuable role in bringing matters of concern to the attention of Government and assisting us in determining priorities that need to be addressed.

The Government supports and promotes an age-friendly communities approach where seniors themselves are included in the decision making processes at the local level. Western Australia is the first Australian jurisdiction to implement an Age-friendly Communities Strategic Planning Framework.

The Government leads the Age-Friendly Interagency Group (AFIG). The group brings together State and local government representatives to identify and share information on key issues affecting Western Australian seniors and develop

collaborative responses to ageing. The group facilitates the development and promotion of strategic responses through either a whole of government approach, individual agency responses or cross-sector collaborations and partnerships.

On 28 June 2016, the Liberal National Government held the Age-Friendly Western Australia Workshop. The workshop was developed by AFIG in collaboration with the Department of Local Government and Communities and Dr Jane Barratt, Secretary General of the International Federation on Ageing. The workshop brought together over 80 representatives from State and local governments, universities and community service organisations to share information on key issues affecting the WA ageing population. Dr Barratt noted that Western Australia leads the world with its unique model of State and local government collaboration to create age-friendly communities.

Since 2006, \$473,200 has been distributed among 70 local governments to optimise opportunities for seniors' health, participation and security by establishing policies, services and structures that enhance the quality of life for community members as they age. This is half the total number of Western Australian local governments. Collectively, 75 per cent of the total Western Australian seniors population reside in local governments which have received funding and are committed to implementing age-friendly strategies and planning principles.

The grants have enabled local governments to conduct research, workshops, interviews and other community engagement methods to investigate the age-friendliness of the community, analyse the findings against the eight essential features of an age-friendly community, and compile an age-friendly communities report.

In 2015–16, the Liberal National Government invested more than one million dollars in a wide range of projects and initiatives that support seniors' inclusion, participation and security. This includes funding for the:

- Older People's Rights Service, run by the Northern Suburbs Community Legal Centre to address the legal needs of people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, elder abuse;
- Elder Abuse Helpline, run by Advocare to provide information and a triage service for any person needing information regarding elder abuse;
- Seniors Housing Centre, a collaboration with the Departments of Commerce, Local Government and Communities and the Council on the Ageing WA to provide direct information regarding housing options for seniors;
- Seniors Recreation Council of WA's activities and programs for seniors;
- Learning Together with Play intergenerational service; and
- Dementia-Friendly Communities work by Alzheimer's Australia WA Ltd.

These services have been implemented as a response to specific research which has shown that seniors want access to accurate and timely information, and support, through a variety of media.

The Liberal National Government also provides direct support to seniors through the Seniors Card program. Approximately 370,000 Western Australian Seniors Card holders can access State Government concessions and rebates worth around

\$1,100 annually for local government rates and water service charges, and public transport. In the 2015–16 financial year, over \$21,800,000 was paid to registered Western Australian Seniors Card holders through the Cost of Living Rebate Scheme. In addition, Western Australian Seniors Card holders can access discounts offered by over 550 businesses.

The Liberal National Government is of the view that the SMAC and the work currently being done under the auspices of the Department of Local Government and Communities, including the associated network groups such as the AFIG, Alliance for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, and Local Government Managers Australia (WA) Age-Friendly Communities Network, serve to ensure the needs of Western Australian seniors are addressed now and into the future. Meeting the needs of our ageing population is a high priority and it is a responsibility shared across the whole of government and the wider community.

Given the mechanisms already in place, I am not convinced that appointing a Western Australian Commissioner for Seniors would be of any tangible benefit.

Yours sincerely



HON TONY SIMPSON MLA
**MINISTER FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT; COMMUNITY SERVICES;
SENIORS AND VOLUNTEERING; YOUTH**

26 JUL 2016